

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF EXCLUSION EXPERIENCED  
BY THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM CHILD DURING SUNDAY  
MORNING WORSHIP SERVICES

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF EXCLUSION EXPERIENCED BY THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM CHILD DURING SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP SERVICES**

by  
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United Theological Seminary, 2018

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The issue this study addresses is the practice of exclusion experienced by the autistic congregants and their families during Sunday morning worship services at the Union Grove Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio. This exclusion results in social and cultural marginalization and alienation for these congregants. The hypothesis emphasis is: If they (the autistic and their families) learn and utilize effective communication strategies, then this will promote an atmosphere of inclusion. The mixed method and data triangulation were used to test the hypothesis. Outcome of the project included increased awareness, a knowledgeable cadre/congregation, a replicable model and trained instructors.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The path chosen had been pre-ordained by the Lord for my life. There were times when my human obstinacy and disobedience slowed the journey, however, God's grace won. I am humbled by the thought of a boy from a low-income area of Akron, Ohio could see the possibility of becoming what is considered a doctor of the church. It is a blessing to know that my life has affected a myriad of Christians, and non-Christians, for this I am sincerely grateful.

To my wife, my love, and my best friend, Kathy—the woman who has become my biggest cheerleader and my inspiration for over forty-six years, thank you for your patience, prayerful positive advice and inspiration that help to keep me grounded in the ministry.

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intellectual perspective was so refreshing. You help us to comply with all the seminary compliance, turning complex issues with such simplicity. Thank you for your dedication.

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To Dr. Jackie Baston, what a brilliant research mind, what a dedicated professor par/excellence; you have taught me, you made me sweat for answers, and never let me go down the path of mediocrity. Like a great researcher, you have taught me to allow the “data to become the mouthpiece” you are a blessing in my life, I thank you.

To my focus group and my friends for life—thank you family for all the interaction, worship, insightful dialogue, the times we laughed and cried the prayers and the preaching will remain in my heart for the balance of my days. To my contextual peers, Vladimir Isaac a trusted friend and confidant, and Joshua Harris, a young Timothy with dynamic wisdom and a gifted preacher/pastor.

To my children, Matthew, Mark, Blandon, and Annetta; the glory of a father is to see his children become a blessing to society. Each of you has accomplished this. I am very proud to be called your father. May the Lord continue to direct your path with the joy and the peace, which comes from being in the will of God!

To my godchild Lillian and her children Vernon, Vincent, and Vanmika, may your lives continue to be enriched by knowing the One who saved us all, Christ Jesus. To

my wife's mom and mine, Maggie and Annie May, a team of warriors for the Lord, and helpers of the highest degree, thank you!

To all my nephews and nieces, family members and friends, "Thank you all!"

To my siblings: Eleanora, Diane, Mary, Terry Johnny and Bobby and Dante; we have seen and experienced many adventures in our lifetime. We have come through many challenges, which made us a unified cohesive family. Thank you all for your patience and support for me and my ministry. Dad was right when he would often sing the song, "We come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord." May you forever remember, "I love you all."

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To the membership of Union Grove Baptist Church; my heart is over-whelmed by your concern for my project, your patience and your thoughtfulness. These twenty-three years as your Pastor has been the joy of my ministry. Your love and support helped me to complete this project.



## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to the glory of God, through my savior Christ Jesus. To my wife, I love you with all my heart. I know within my heart that without you I would not have pursued this momentous task.

Somewhere in glory there are two people who gave me life, my mom Dora and my dad Henry. It is difficult for me to say their first name out of respect for who they are, I would always call them mom and dad. Mom, who had limited education with seven children; she took being a mother above and beyond the call of duty. As a housewife, she made our home a refuge and stretched money and groceries in a way that allowed seven children to survive through impossible odds. We knew she loved us by the way she provided for us. There was not much money; but the greatest legacy that was bequeathed to us was the importance of Christ in my life, thank you mom.

Dad, what an amazing man and an amazing legacy; limited education, self-taught, pastored three churches, ran for mayor of a city. If my dad had all the opportunities for education as I have experienced in my life, he would have been far beyond my educational attainments. Thanks Dad for being a father, a provider, an innovator in ministry, and my friend.

My granddaughter, Maya! She is not aware of the things I am writing about her because she is the reason for this project; she is an autistic spectrum child who is learning and developing. She helped to inspire the sign ministry at our church; she helped to create autism awareness in our church and a caring spirit. Heaven only knows how much I love

my granddaughter. One of the things about heaven, which leaves me speechless is that one day, all deficiencies, and disorders, all physically, and mentally challenging entities that are a part of the world, will become a thing of the past in heaven. That is the day I look forward to with all my heart.

Marylyn, a loving grandmother with a heart of gold; your patience and understanding is priceless in an age of narcissistic concepts and ideas.

Langston, the big brother, my greatest wish as a grandson; you have shown your love for your sister so many times. Only the lord knows what selfless acts you have performed. You have extended the life of your sister by your activity and your love. For this I am truly grateful.

Annetta, words cannot express the love I have for you and the way, you have shown your love for your daughter Maya. You define motherhood by the way you care for Maya. The many sleepless nights, the many disjointed days and episodes, which led to uncompleted tasks which carried over to the next day. May your life be filled with every kind gesture you poured in the life of your daughter!

## INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of the word “exclusion,” a myriad of experiences come to the forefront that could last a lifetime. The vestiges of the history of our United States is inundated with exclusivity and margination based solely upon race and class. With the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation it appeared that there was hope for the masses. A renaissance of ideology ushered in the mid-1800s saw a new direction for the excluded with the Reconstruction Period. There was a nuance of former slaves in the political arena debating and legislating laws and policies with former slave owners. The period lasted about twenty-five to thirty years. There seems to be an ebb and flow with exclusion.<sup>1</sup>

According to Jill Boucher, autism has almost certainly existed in human populations but was not recognized and labeled a condition until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Because of the lack of awareness and many cultural taboos, people of all classes and races were labeled simpletons, imbeciles, and feeble-minded<sup>3</sup>. Brian Brock, in his book, *Disability in The Christian Tradition* states in his introduction:

Often the language of gender, race, and nationalism cloaks deeper assumptions that the health and well-being of societies depends on being able to spot the threat presented to them by broken or malfunctioning bodies and minds. Quests to root-out perceived moral and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Kelly and Earl Lewis, *A History of African Americans to 1880*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), Kindle edition.

<sup>2</sup> Jill Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum: Characteristics, Causes, and Practical Issues*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications 2009), Kindle edition.

<sup>3</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, Kindle edition.

deficiencies can therefore all too easily intertwine with suspicions that there are deeper physical and mental deficiencies at their root; it is therefore not far-fetched to claim that the polarity between abled and disabled humanity underlies the whole range of prejudicial attitudes that have been resisted by activists over the last hundred years, misogyny, racism, and nationalism being the most prominent.<sup>4</sup>

Children who were not criminals but only had physical and mental deficiencies were warehoused in places including mental wards, almshouses for the poor, research asylums, prisons, jails, and many other inappropriate places, depending upon the state and local governmental bodies, funding, and those who had a conscience, which included these individuals.<sup>5</sup> The implementation of awareness from the church community is coined by Thomas E. Reynolds as hospitality; it is described as: vulnerability, a mixing between guest and host that undoes the distinction between outsiders and insider. Doors swing open and strangers are welcome as part of the household. Here boundaries shade into one another, for the generosity of hospitality consents to a kind of role reversal that now also leaves the host vulnerable and dependent... here the stranger is welcomed as a neighbor...<sup>6</sup>

It is the intent of this project to create awareness that within the actual worship setting, a subtle but an exclusivity that exists even at a time when unity should be achieved, and harmony should prevail, at the very time when God is worshiped and praised.

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Brock and John Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012) Kindle edition.

<sup>5</sup> David Wagner, *The Miracle Worker and the Transcendentalist* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Publishers, 2012), Kindle edition.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

This project will focus upon the contextual culture of Union Grove Baptist Church, from its beginning in 1888, up to this present time. How racial mindset in the 1940s led to self-awareness which produced a dependence upon one's self for survival which gave rise to grocery stores and shops, and their own professional doctors and lawyers, reporters and entertainers and how the church played a great role in this environment. This is the positive aspect of this setting. However, the backdrop, which is clearly seen in this contemporary society is a secluded conversation of families with autism. There is a sense in which they try to hide, cope, and go along without help or support.

Scriptures point to providence as the key to understanding this phenomenon. God, the ever-present help in times of trouble, will assist and eventually make clear His reasoning behind every sorrowful moment. This is reinforced by the writers of doctrine from the traditional understanding of the providential care of God, to the contemporary understanding of this subject, which includes those who have other ideas about providence. Then, what do other institutions contribute to the awareness and understanding of the autistic spectrum child? How do the institutions play a part in correcting exclusivity? This is the challenge of this project as the writer addresses the problem of exclusion experienced by the autistic spectrum child, during Sunday morning worship services. How can this be achieved? By a systematic training for the implementation of a cadre group to help parents, caretakers, and congregation to become aware, by workshops, sermons, questionnaires, and interviews, it will show an increased awareness, thus creating an atmosphere of inclusivity and acceptance of the autistic spectrum child during Sunday morning worship services.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

Her name is Maya. She is my granddaughter and the reason for my topic. Maya entered this world on January 8, 2000, with a multiplicity of conundrums under the heading and category of autism and Usher syndrome; a problem with sight impairment and balance. This is a frightening and intimidating debilitating human malady, which affects one out of sixty-eight individuals—statistics show an increase in ratio. Her prognosis was quite stunning. The doctor told my daughter, Maya would not be able to walk, talk, or think cognitively enough to recognize even her mother and other relatives. I must say the doctor was correct in some areas and incorrect in other areas. Maya was running at eighteen months, recognized her mother and all other relatives. She can utilize American Sign Language, hear with the aid of the most innovative technical device known as cochlear implants (CI) in both ears, and she is experiencing a reasonable quality of life because of family care and provision for her. The frustration lies in her continual medication, anxiety, frustration, and anger she displays by mutilating her hands and arms when angry, and her rage and destruction of property. We had damaged car seats and windows, lamps, toys and others. There is another side to Maya, she can be loving, kind, and her laughter can often become contagious. I am not sure if she is aware of the attitudinal change, yet for me, my family and church family lives have been enriched because of Maya.

For the last ten years, a friend from North Carolina visits our church. His name is Todd. He is an older gentleman with down syndrome who is supported by his family. The family, in North Carolina takes good care of him with the collaboration of all family members wherever they live. Todd is visiting with his family who are members of our church. His visitation usually lasts during the summer, and then he is returned to his family in North Carolina. On one morning in the fall of the year, the family went to Todd to check on him only to find that he had transitioned into heaven during the night. He died peacefully. This fifty-three year old man brought much joy to the family and to our church family with a winsome attitude about life and living. He loved dressing up and of course his brother, who is the chairman of our deacon board, was happy to carry out his various wishes. Todd's life made a difference in the lives of his family and others. He met Maya and a friendship ensued.

After the funeral, one of the family members recalled a comment by Todd. Before he passed away, Todd was reported saying, "You have taken care of me, but now Jesus is going to take care of me."

This recollection has permeated my mind and heart. A great assignment is given to families that assist mentally and physically challenged individuals. It is our responsibility to take care of our debilitated loved ones while they are with us. To nurture them with love and take care of their needs as caretakers, providers, teachers, nutritionists, personal hygiene, transportation directors, recreational cohorts, security, pharmacist and many other notable hats. Until the Lord in His infinite wisdom and divine care lovingly transitions them to the land where there will no longer be disabilities or handicaps.

My spiritual autobiography writing indicates my proclivity to be a part of the helping process. I will point out certain areas of my writings, which indicate this finding. Conceptual framework is interfaced within this synergy piece. This is a combination and collaboration of the spiritual autobiography and the contextual analysis. There are some seamless points within the two writings, which I would like to focus. It is important to study purpose, guiding questions, significance of findings, and its impact upon my development and transformation.

The why question appears in the hearts of families who have been given this assignment, why my family? Why would a loving and kind God assign this malady to us? Is this a mutation in genetics? Will our future children face the same problem? Is there someone who can help us face such a grave situation? Where can we go? Why do I feel embarrassed and ashamed? Did we do something in our lives that merit this judgment of God? What will happen to my child if the Lord called me home before they depart? Who is dependable enough, my family, or an institution, that I may place my child in their hands? These and many other thoughts will be examined in this synergy paper. There are references such as Autism Speaks and clinical writings by the medical, psychological, biological, and Christian communities, which will aid me in my quest to compile a comprehensive paper to aid the families with this special assignment.

My reason for compiling the paper is simple and it is a personal reason with Christian community implications, I want to help my little granddaughter. I am concerned about her condition, her anger, and her wellbeing. Our society has a history of pushing the helpless to the side and making fun and intimidating those who cannot help themselves. In recent times it has changed substantially, nevertheless, it still exists. If I



can draw from my experience with Maya, and assist her best I can, I feel that assistance in the form of a paper, can help others who are facing the same dilemma as my family. The sleepless nights, the anticipated phone calls of another incident at school, the constant agony of the heart as she stumbles and falls, or the frustration on her face when she cannot communicate her wants or desires. She had a faraway look in her eyes when the medication was not quite right and need of adjustments. The destruction of the car in the form of torn seats and sometime destroyed windows because of anger issues. The question of whether or not she should be taken based upon the condition of her daily attitude and demeanor. I will draw together the notable synergism that exists within the contextual information that was developed and the ability I was made aware of through my spiritual-autobiography.

### **Needs of the Context**

Upon further examination of the context, I was made aware of the gradual increase in physically and mentally challenged individuals in general and specifically in autism. We will examine the reasoning for such an up spike in these conditions. There is an abundance of elderly within the church structure. With this abundance comes an analytical and sober sense of human mortality. This awareness becomes a healthy caring of human frailties and limitation. Compassion and sensitivity is heightening along with the need of thoughtful and prayerful diligence in the area of resolutions to the problems of the ageing and for anyone who faces debilitating maladies. If given the right information, they are eager to help and eager to learn within these areas of our concentration and concern.

This community has a history of self-sustaining, sociological input. Because of racism and segregation, their intuitive desire for information is a part of their makeup, from information leading to their entrepreneurial achievements—we see barber shops, grocery, clothing, shoes shops, banks, dentistry, medicine, teachers and professionals—to the formation of fact finding entities within the church structure. The churches during the days of civil rights were used as meeting places for various issues, which affect the health and well being of the community. It is always open for the needs of the people. If there is a need, the church will respond with information and inspiration. The collaboration among the people shows up in many forms; from having bake sales for neighbors in need, to receiving offerings from the church settings. In most cases, whatever occurs, there is a sense of adaptability to the various circumstances. The need is for individuals who can articulate and address the problems and find solutions. There is an open ear and heart for this type of forum.

The context speaks of retired schoolteachers who have disciplined and trained themselves in various areas of study; their teaching inclination does not retire with their actual retirement. Because of this topic, they can be easily re-tooled and focused upon this issue. They experienced it in the class setting; they are more aware and can detect and serve as conduits for the suffering in the community of the families of the hurting, and act as liaison between the autistic/family community and the church community and others.

Because of the heightened awareness of the physically and mentally challenged within the context, a group of people are described as health professionals. This includes people who work within a hospital setting—doctors, paramedics, firemen, policemen,

nurses, and others. The others include nurses who are not in the nursing field as their profession, but serve on a Nurses Corp within the structure of the local church. They serve with distinction, and they incorporate training within the auxiliary structure. They represent the health field within the church community. Their role is to identify a need and address it the best they can with training and resources that are available. They are aware of the illness of Alzheimer's, which affects the elderly, Down Syndrome, which is devastating to the person and the family, and autism which is becoming more and more prevalent in our communities. When the health professionals speak, they speak from awareness and experience, which impacts the community that stirs the interest and the intellect and help identify the need.

The children within the context of the church community are very sensitive to the need of the challenged individuals. There are some who will make fun and stir up a hilarious, yet lack understanding type of trait, but they are outweighed by the compassionate young people who feel obligated to help the helpless, and become contributors to the resolve of autism. Some children upon meeting Maya would ask questions: Is she ok? Why is she like that? Can we help? Is there something I can do? Does she like candy? I want to take her over there. Will she play with us? This is a very touching picture of caring young people who could be doing something else but chose to find out about an autistic child with their need to express themselves to Maya they are willing to learn American Sign Language.

Communication is a vital and important component within the autistic community and the need is great for those who have the ability to relate in various ways. Frustration occurs when the autistic person has something to relate and no one is there to interpret.

Not all autistic persons have the same ability or inability to hear, there are varying degrees of deafness, it is a must to identify the communication need component which is going to take specialists trained in the field of technological expertise such as implants, hearing devices, and people who have the ability to use sign language and the ability to learn cognitively and intuitively the various inflections and motions of subtle and implied communication within the context of the church community. The need is great for a staff or auxiliary within the church community to relay the words of a given speaker within the context of church worship so that clarity might develop and communication might flourish and embrace not only worshipers, but also the entire process of autism awareness and acceptance as the norm rather than the exception. The volunteers and if possible, the staff personnel become the vocal mouth piece for 1.2% of the population that only hope will be understood, not only in church, but also within the marketplace.

Imagine not being able to articulate your wishes and concerns for many years only to produce sounds of grunts and gestures, then seeing the people who have been trained to communicate through various mode of operation, supply a need that is there. You see for the first time someone, if given the chance and the training, speaking with (through various means) the autistic child and it causes a smile to show up on the faces of those being assisted and those family members who are speechless because of the results.

The leadership component within the context historically has been male-dominated with outstanding results: Bishop Poindexter, Carl Brown, Dr. Phale D. Hale, and others. Today, in the atmosphere of autism and other challenging discrepancies and human maladies, the leadership has to be diversified to the point that it includes more

matriarchal leadership which has the sensitivity and the proclivity to address these sensitive subjects.

Within the context and the 1% physically and mentally challenged there are three families that have or acknowledged they have family members that meet this criterion. The number could possibly larger if the element of secrecy was not a part of the equation. The number of physically or mentally handicap guests that attend our church is two. This statistic does not include the membership that has or remains borderline Alzheimer's disease. Therefore, there is a need of outreach to these individuals, an open forum of discussion to break down the walls of secrecy and distrust and allow a healthy understanding and acceptance of the same.

The membership longevity has been an asset to the consistency and the viability that undergirds the support of the church. It is this same consistency that prompts our awareness of the aging process and all its ramifications, which require consistent training intervention for caretakers and health providers along with spiritual element.

At least 1% of mentally and physically challenged individuals exist within the geological and sociological demographic. They exist in other faith-based institutions, other residential areas that permeate the Near East Side corridor, in academia as students within the public school system and within colleges and other institutions of higher learning. There is a need of information and instruction in this field of endeavor, which would enhance and help the context.

The strength of the neighborhoods and faith-based institutions and our own prescribed autonomous mentality has helped to lay the groundwork for the success of the community. However, this strength can also become a liability if it is not made aware of

its limitations within the context of the physically and mentally challenged community. There are identified specific needs which must be carefully addressed, by someone or a group that has been authorized and trained specifically to meet the needs of that community, with compassion, clarity and knowledge.

There is also the revitalization of the entire contextual area with the Senior Citizen 104 unit apartment, residential housing, condos, and other dwellings. With this revitalization, will come the physically and mentally challenged in some form, which will need compassion and assistance in caring and helping others to cope with the various conundrum and perplexities that will ensue.

### **My Skills and Interests**

I was made aware of my interest and skills through the thought provoking maze of tapestry found in my spiritual autobiography. I have never seen so many entries for the gift of helping and caring imparted in my life. From my concern for a physically and mentally challenged girl across the street from our house, to the elderly couple next door, it is been my choice to assist with cleaning chores to picking up groceries. Ever since our house was destroyed by fire and our lives were saved and the caring people would come to our aid with food and shelter. The many different agencies like the Salvation Army and others, helped us in our time of need, it seems this conviction has been given to me, it seems as though it was passed on to me from a compassionate father and mother who loved the unity and fellowship of the family and would strive diligently to make sure family members were taken care of even if it meant their needs were, at times, neglected or delayed.

I could not know that later in my life after the children are grown and out on their own, that I would face a challenging crisis in the form of an autistic child named Maya. Maya awakened the compassion and the helping element within my life into another level. The skill set I had to develop to assist her was crucial and critical because when she is with me, the intensity is twenty-four hours.

My life and skillset compliments the context. The need is to find a methodology that is commensurate and collaborative to the issues that are identified within this paper. I feel with my compassion, concern, and ability to learn and instruct will enhance the understanding and application to the challenged community. The educational background in the area of sociology, political science, my ability through the development in courses of counseling will aid in human communication and relationships in terms of being a mediator and advisor to the challenged community. My training in theology and the spiritual aspect is also an important element in the overall wellness component. This cannot be a project of one, but an objective of many. With my skillset of collaboration initiative, I believe I can earn the trust of others and help to initiate, motivate, and inspire others to assist with education and training within the context. There must be a transitional element to this project.

This project must be about the business of seeking, finding, and applying. There must be an acute awareness of the problem; a definition of the various areas that entail the vastness of the problem, and addressing of the many questions that spring forth from such a major progressive problem, our concerns, our inquiry, our endeavors, our reasonable conclusions and findings, our teachable and learnable application, our desire to help and share become preeminent in our studious and prayerful approach to coping

with this debilitating malady. It is my earnest desire to show the caretakers and family members of the challenged individuals although you are inundated with cares and duties and sometime they are so overwhelming you wonder when will it all end. You cry sometimes secretly within the confines of your own heart and in your quiet place of prayer and meditation. You seek guidance from the Lord as you proceed with each day, sometimes you are inspired to go further that day, but some days you hit a roadblock that stuns and keeps you from achieving your goals for that day.

My overall theme seems to be in the area of coping, which is described as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing.” Coping is not eliminating, it is helping a person to rise above the challenges and demands placed upon an individual or caretaker. In the global scheme, we are never alone, and the Lord who gave us this assignment will continue to be with us and help us complete the assignment, even if it includes a form of institutionalization into the hands of caring and compassionate persons like you. Our overall transcendence comes from the Lord. He orders our steps, He gives assignments, He helps our development and maturity as time passes and He will acknowledge, at His own discretion, our desire to please Him with our service for others.

### **Identify the Topic of Exploration**

The topic is so vast that I must narrow it down to the area of autism. This to say the least is vast in its own right. Because my wife and I are grandparents I would like to examine this condition from a grandparent’s perspective because there are many



grandparents who have found their latter years filled with becoming caretakers for their physically and mentally challenged grandchildren.

I have found that genetics play a major part in autism. It seems to center around sensory perception, or how the nervous system receives messages from several areas of our human existence: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, vestibular, proprioception, and interoception. The visual is responsible for the seeing, auditory for hearing, olfactory for the process of smelling, gustatory, the sense of taste, tactile, that which is responsible for the process of touch, vestibular, the balance and orientation in space, proprioception, the sense of muscle and/ or joint movement, and interoception, the process or sensations that relate to the physiological/ physical condition of the body as it relates to respiratory and digestive mucus membrane, it is also related to the automatic motor control of the human system. In autism these vital and sensitive entities can and will become often off-track and result in a multiplicity of conundrums, from slowness in performing tasks, bumping into things, does not like being touched, will not hug on her own, difficulty in breaking a set routine, mood swings and unexpected temper tantrums, trouble falling asleep without medical help, and many other symptoms.

Somehow this stimulates my thirst for understanding this malady. The build-in adaptability of my experiences, the history of my family, and the contexts aid me in my quest to help others, and through my paper, cope with the peculiarities of autism.

If it were possible to remove this malady from the face of the earth, I would be the first to petition this resolve. If by the power of concentrated will and might I could take away the tears and yearning for a sound and healthy grandchild, it would be my fervent prayer in each and every waking hour of my day. I would erase the thought of my

granddaughter not being able to experience the joy of high school, with its pomp and circumstance, the experience of dating and the pain of breaking-up, the rigors of college life and academic of discipline and study, the actual thrill of learning how to drive, and the bliss of marital relationship. I wish these were in my granddaughter's future, but without divine intervention these are only thoughts from a caring and concerned grandfather.

There was once a father and his son walking in the yard during a fall afternoon. The son noticed in a tree what seemed to be a little cloth pocket attached to the branch by a small stick like element from the base of the cocoon. The father explained the process of transformation, while speaking to his son it seemed as though the cocoon was cracking open and a butterfly was about to appear. The son was so excited over the upcoming event he could hardly wait for the transformation to take place. In fact he thought it was his responsibility to help the butterfly along by opening further the cocoon. His father held him back and told and gave him a principle that applies to all areas of life, even in the area of autism, the principle is "Do not assist this butterfly in its quest to come out of the cocoon because it needed the struggle to prepare its wings for flight." Within that struggling the building of small minute muscles are formulating around small vessels and sinew, without the effort or if something stopped the process, the butterfly would fall to the ground. We are covered and cared for by a loving God who knows and understands our frame and remember we are dust.

There is nothing that surprises our God, and nothing is done in our lives by happenstance. This special child of autism is given to us for a reason. We must not disrupt the divine process, or we will miss the reason and the growth process, which must

take place in order for us to achieve the very intent of God's divine providence working in our lives. Just be patient and prayerful and watch the hand of God as He works wonders in the life of the family, in the context, and in the life of the autistic child. Only the Lord knows how many physically and mentally challenged individuals has become the catalyst for leading others to the cross of Calvary. It is my task to remind the families of this important thought and to show the coping process through my experiences and my understanding of the subject matter.

### **The General Nature and Content of Proposed Project**

There is a thread weaving through all the effort I can give, it is beyond the statistical, historical, ontological thought. It has its origin in the nature and framework of humankind. It is the thought that there is not anything so critical that an arm of care cannot support. One of the faithful servants of the most high expressed it more eloquently than I:

Lord, let me be an instrument of thy peace...Grant that I might not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console; To be understood, as to understand; To be loved as  
to love (St Francis of Assisi).

The book of Genesis makes it very clear that all creation is of value to God, and with His creative might and power He blessed it all (Gn 1:31). Within this backdrop of blessed humanity I would like to extract a genetic model of autism or Autistic Disorder Syndrome (ADS). Autism touches every social class, ethnicity, in many shapes, size, and colors. There is no culture or spectrum of human existence that has not been touched by the fingers of autism. It can range from mild conditional diagnosis to the severely pronounced condition.

It is my quest to present a journey through autism. This journey will include findings from specialists, from families of autistic children, from the church community, and through the eyes of grandparents. It will be an emotional, thought provoking, self-evaluating journey that will hopefully enlighten, inspire, and motivate the reader. There is so much to cover and so many things to bring to light that I am almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of the subject matter. Yet, I am excited by the challenge and hopefully will paint a true, candid, and caring picture of autism from people who would at this period of their lives travel and enjoy the fruit of their labor, yet they choose to become a blessing to their family by securing and caring for that hurting part of their family, autistic grandchildren.

I will deal with topics such as: the life cycle of autism, the emotional segment of autism, autism and the family, autism and the church community, autism and education, autism and the government, autism and the justice system, how to cope with autism, the watchful eye of grandparents and autism, autism and a loving God, and finally, the shift of sentiment toward autism.

We are all teachers and as teachers we teach at different levels based upon our capacity to learn and our ability to communicate that knowledge in a way that it can be received. Linda Meyers, Executive Director of The New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autistic Community, expresses this teaching segment with the following input.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Beth Walsh, Alice F. Walsh, and William C. Gaventa, eds., *Autism And Faith: A Journey Into Community*, Published by The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center, 2008, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter>.

Teach each individual with an autism spectrum disorder with:

1. Compassion...to make a difference in the life of an individual with an autism spectrum disorder, you will need to go beyond what is convenient and easy
2. Understanding...of the spectrum of differences
3. Acceptance...welcome all and those who accompany them by your positive verbal and nonverbal behavior
4. Respect... the individual gifts each person brings to his/her relationship with God and the community, and their privacy
5. Support...until everyone can take advantage of naturally occurring supports
6. Tolerance...to recognize and allow for deficits
7. Patience...while skills are repeatedly practiced
8. Willingness...to hear and learn about challenges, how people learn, and when and how you could respond (or not respond in some cases)
9. High expectations...know that all can learn the necessary skills to become full and contributing members of the community

A lot of times, the treatment of the autistic child has a great bearing upon what decisions the parent or parents will make in regard to housing, church attendance, social clubs and social interaction among peers and colleagues. I would like to share the story from a person who remains anonymous:

While sitting in worship with my two young children, an older woman asked me to remove my disruptive toddler. She spoke with a condemning tone, one I would soon become immune to. I took my children to the nursery and cried. A few weeks later, I tried to take my children to worship again, but my son was just as disruptive. When I stood up to leave, the pastor stopped me. In the middle of her sermon, she told me to sit down. She told the rest of the congregation that my son was a member of our church and that it was all of our responsibility to raise him and to teach him the ways of God.

The tears I am shedding as I write this story are ones of gratitude in contrast to those I shed seven years ago in the nursery of my church. These episodes in the life of the autistic child, parents, and grandparents happen on a

daily basis from people who have little or no knowledge in the subject and do not know the damage they could possibly cause to the autistic community.

Mary Beth Walsh makes this statement, which sums my thoughts and compassion for the elevation of the church community in becoming an advocate for the autistic community:

Communities of faith can mitigate the isolation that autism often brings. They can provide a place of solace and refuge. They can become a haven of acceptance and belonging for individuals with autism and their families. Welcoming, inclusive faith communities can make a powerful difference in the lives of families living with autism. Becoming a welcoming faith community will take some effort, but any such effort is amply justified by many of the central faith claims of diverse religious traditions.<sup>2</sup>

It is the aim and goal of this paper to relate current understanding of autism. As described by Dr. Gerhardt<sup>3</sup> autism is “a developmental disorder that impacts an individual’s ability to effectively communicate and understand reciprocal social behavior.” Gerhardt also says:

The area of challenges common to all individuals with ASDs are restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. The diversity, however, comes in how these patterns are expressed in each individual across the ability spectrum. For one individual, it may mean a near total fascination with the green straws at Starbucks. For another, it may mean knowing, in precise detail, the evolution of the IBM electric Typewriter. Individuals may engage in a variety of repetitive actions or movements (body rocking or hand flapping, for example) called stereotypies. While we all engage in stereotypic behavior (twisting your hair when bored or tapping your pencil while you work), learners on the spectrum do so at a much greater frequency and intensity than do typical learners and, unsurprisingly, without an understanding of the social rules governing such behaviors (that is, for most people, those behaviors tend to be private rather than public).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Walsh, Walsh, and Gaventa, *Autism And Faith: A Journey Into Community*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Walsh, Walsh, and Gaventa, *Autism And Faith: A Journey Into Community*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, Walsh, and Gaventa, *Autism And Faith: A Journey Into Community*, 7.

If ever one would like to see a picture of autism through the eyes of the movie industry, just take time to look at the acute ability of Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise in the Film “The Rain Man.” Dustin Hoffman is superb in his portrayal of an autistic man who has been institutionalized and his brother, played by Tom Cruise, has come to the realization (after the death of his father) that the family fortune is tied to the caring of the autistic brother. Watch the sequence of events that ensued, the different personality idiosyncratic reactions occur when the Tom Cruise tries to change the autistic man’s regular routine or tries to hug him, or tries to make him do something that is not a part of his daily activities, see the repetitive conversation they have with the fact that his purchasing of undergarments were not the proper kind. These things are a part of the daily affairs, (some more, some less) of the autistic community.

My overall proposal is coping with autism. I will develop this proposal using the deductive method of compiling data and information to buttress or support the proposal, which will also include the grandparents in the equation of autism. Moving from the general statement of belief to specific evidence supporting that belief with analysis of data with interpretation intended to support the position, arguments tied to evidences to support the thesis, and a convincing conclusion using evidence to support a stance on a debatable issue.

In this document and the Doctor of Ministry project, I will seek to learn not only knowledge of the malady, since it brings forth new challenges each day, but a developing mature attitude about the whole spectrum of autism, a renewed resolve to share my understanding of the autistic community, and helping grandparents like myself cope with the stressful activities which accompany our domain. To become liaisons between the

context and the autistic community in terms of communication and comfortably, to instruct with caution and care, to support the cause of autism and to live as a once maladjusted sinner with no hope and no home, and to be transformed by the blood of Christ into a witness to all forms of maladjusted lives and say to them because of Jesus becoming culpable for us on the cross, we become capable to cope with the vicissitudes of life. I pray that the blessings of the Lord will be upon this project and that it will be beneficial to many in the time to come.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

From the collective writing of semester one, emerges a central theme, which categorizes disability within the church community. I asked myself this question, “How is it addressed in my community?” My experience with this subject comes from a life dedicated to assisting and helping. I was not fully aware that this would become the central focus of my dissertation and my life through ministry. My granddaughter, Maya, is autistic. It is her life that has helped to identify my focus, care, and concern for this subject.

With the help of faculty consultant Dr. Presian Burroughs, and mentors Dr. Keith Lawrence and Dr. Kenneth Marcus, there are unique scriptures that give a unique understanding to the problem of physical and mental disability, specifically the problem of autism. Several probing questions guide my study:

- Why does autism exist?
- Does scripture address this topic?
- Can the scripture chosen become helpful or controversial?
- Why would a good God allow autism in the world He created?
- Is there hope for the individuals, family, and church community?

The journey takes us through the deserts of Egypt and center around the area in and around Mt Sinai, beginning with the commission of Moses. As a part of this dissertation, I will capture his response to the call of God and his reaction when he learned that he was to be sent back to the same place in which he grew and lived for over forty years. He was hesitant and reluctant to accept God's calling even though God informed him of His over-whelming provisions and protection. It is my aim to discuss the text to find the proper meaning within the scope of Moses and Mt Sinai and how applicable it is to us who represent the church community that exists in a very different context.

The journey will also cover the post-resurrection period of the church age through the leadership and missionary work of the Apostle Paul, with a main focus on the church at Corinth. Paul takes time to share with this church the importance of recognizing the body of Christ as the people of God. He illustrates the body of Christ as an actual human body with arms, legs, and a human frame. His point is that when we come together to make up this body of Christ, we should not forget or ignore the feeble parts of the body, the neglected and overlooked parts of the body because it is through these feeble parts God does a wondrous work. Let us see if the feeble part of the body is an asset or a liability. The same treatment that will be applied to Moses' scripture (Ex 4:10-12) will also be applied to Paul's writings to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 12: 20-25).

The problem is autism. It is a term generally known as a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. I wish to discuss to what extent does autism affect the church community. Is it

one of those subjects that one feels uncomfortable to address? Has the community secretly disavowed any association with this matter because it touches us personally and makes us uncomfortable? Within my own church membership, there are two individuals who are mentally and physically challenged. At least one percent of mentally and physically challenged individuals exist within the geological and sociological demographic. They exist in other faith-based institutions, other residential areas that permeate the Near East Side corridor, in academia as students within the public school system and within colleges and other institutions of higher learning. Even though this percentage is small, the challenge is still great, even necessary in knowing how to address and overcome the problems of autism or at least give support to those who are autistic to develop coping skills.

This chapter will compare biblical texts in a synergistic way, in accordance with the pathos and the questions surrounding the problem and the solution of autism as it affects our families and church community. By and large, the community is not acutely aware of the nuances of autism. This could be a primary reason the community has little acceptance, let alone tolerance of individuals with autism. Proper education and training in this chosen area will go a long way in at least pursuing the right direction for support and at least, civility. We must not omit the power and persistency of prayer. All these elements give a positive outlook to the problem and a solution to autism.

## Old Testament

Let us ask the question, “Does the Bible address the problems of autism?”

The Bible has much to say about the problems of being disabled, but it addresses it in a different literary language such as being in a form of helplessness. Other descriptive words include impotent, lame, maimed, dumb, halt (an archaic term meaning to walk lamely or move in an irregular fashion)<sup>1</sup>, withered, sightless, or in a state of homelessness or a stranger. Some examples of scripture as found in the King James Version as follows:

John 5:3 – In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.<sup>2</sup>

Luke 14:21 – So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

In Leviticus, Moses commanded Aaron that any man who is to serve in the priesthood, who has a physical flaw, must not approach the veil or altar (Lv 21:18). This is a picture of the absolute perfection in Christ, who is without spot and blemish. However, the scriptures also give a warning to those who taunt or make fun of the disabled or the poor.

Proverbs 17:5 The one who mocks the poor insults his Creator (NASB).

Zephaniah 3:19 Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth (NASB).

The scripture's welfare system for these individuals consisted of allowing them to glean freely in the corners of the field of grain, which is left for the poor and strangers

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<sup>1</sup> Halt, *The Free Dictionary*, accessed February 9, 2016, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/halt>.

<sup>2</sup> John 5:3, The Kings James Bible. All other references unless otherwise indicated are from the KJV.

(Lv 19:9-10; Dt 24:19; Ru 2:2). There is also an element of tolerance shown to the disabled by virtue of the fact that in order for David to escape punishment from his enemies, he played a mentally and physically disabled man (1 Sm 21:13). Even after becoming King of Israel, David provided for a young man by the name of Mephibosheth who was one of the sons of his beloved friend Jonathan (2 Sm 4:4). In an eschatological sense, the Old Testament brings us closer to the idea when deformity, mental and physical disabilities, no longer is a part of humanity. “On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord” (Ez 24:27; Zep 3:19 NASB).

The New Testament also addresses the problem of disabilities from the standpoint of the healing properties of the promised Messiah (Is 61). Jesus heals the lame, the crippled, the blind, and the deaf (Jn 9; Mk 7:35-37; Lk 1:64; Lk 4:16-20). My chosen pericope of the New Testament relates the body of Christ or the fellowship of the church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:20-25). This literary text is significant to the function of the body as we see how they handle disabilities within the context of being the weaker part or the feeble part of the body.

### *Historical-Cultural Context*

Our pericope of the Old Testament, Exodus 4:10-12, enlightens and challenges our understanding about the fairness of a God who would be the Creator even of disabilities. Exodus is the second of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. The common Hebrew term for this collection is the Torah; law, instruction, or teaching. As part of Torah, Exodus is not simply a story about the past but is intended to provide a

pattern and guide for all time.<sup>3</sup> As I examine these passages of scripture, my objective mind must allow for the context and culture of an ancient text to help with the explanation and thus give new meaning and interpretation.

Most scholars disagree as to the authorship of Exodus. Carol Meyers says the traditional authorship which is ascribed to Moses is based on Exodus 24:4, “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel” and 34:27, 28 “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.” She further states:

Important documents were inscribed on stone tablets or monuments in ancient Near East, and the importance of the Decalogue as a covenant with God and as the foundation of community beliefs and values surely deserved such concretization. The tablets, understood to have been written by God (34:1), thus constitute the direct record of the relationship of their people with their God... Chapter 24 explicitly involves the community and its select priestly and civic leaders in the covenant ratification ceremony and even in the astonishing theophany at the mountain. Yet the centrality of Moses in this episode is unmistakable. Moses tells the people what God’s words are; he, and not Aaron, is the one who smears the sacrificial blood on the altar and the people; Moses is the one whom God beckons to “come up to me on the mountain;” and Moses is the one who enters the cloud that is God’s presence and remains there for forty days and nights.<sup>4</sup>

The differences in vocabulary, style, and ideas are also discernible which would be a composite of traditions shaped over many centuries by an unknown number of anonymous storytellers and writers which comprise four major sources known as J, E, D, and P.<sup>5</sup> I conclude with the traditional Mosaic writing activity found in the previous

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<sup>3</sup> Katharine D. Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 371.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010), 81, Kindle.

scriptures and including Exodus 17:14, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven,’” and Exodus 27-29. According to Longman Tremper III, who says,

In light of the fact that the text does not name the pharaoh of Egypt at the time, the dating of exodus event is difficult. Two tests are relevant to the date of exodus. The first and most direct statement is I Kings 6:1... In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord.” This passage places the exodus 480 years *before Solomon’s fourth regnal year, for which scholars are able to give an absolute date of 967 BC or thereabouts, allowing for the possibility of a rounded-off number . . .*<sup>6</sup>

But it is not the date of the exodus from Egypt that interests me. It is the man whom God has called to lead the children of Israel who we begin to see emerging as an apprehensive and a reluctant leader who in spite of being in the presence of Yahweh in the wilderness of Sinai, expresses doubt because of itemized short comings in the form of what he perceives as disabilities to become God’s representative in behalf of His people Israel. He is to tell and then show Pharaoh the immediacy and the necessity of letting the people go. His name is Moses (Heb Mosheh) which the Bible explains as meaning “Because I drew [from Heb. Mashah,<sup>7</sup> ‘to draw’] him out of the water” (Ex 2:10), his name could also be an Egyptian one meaning “is born” (cf. the last component of such Egyptian names as Thutmose and Ahmose).<sup>8</sup>

Before we can see the leadership of Moses, it is also important to address the

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<sup>6</sup> Tremper Longman III, and Raymond B. Dillard, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2006), 1433 Kindle.

<sup>7</sup> *Blue Letter Bible Lexicon*: Strong’s H4871 - mashah, accessed March 23, 2016 <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=h4871>.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1989), 29241, Kindle.

questions of Sovereignty and Providence within the framework of God's attributes or ability. We will discover answers when we ask the following questions:

- How do these terms make sense in human dynamics?
- Is it possible to come to a sensible outcome on this subject?

To understand how the children of Jacob came to be in Egypt, we need to learn about one of his children, Joseph. Joseph who saves the world from starvation through the providence of God precedes the beginning of Exodus. In Genesis 37, we see the story of Joseph and his dreams. His brothers hated him because they *saw that their father loved* him more than any of them (vs 3). They sold him and faked his death. His father, Jacob, thought some ferocious animal killed him (vs 33). Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave. In Genesis 39, Joseph was put into prison and there, he found favor with the prison warden. It was in prison that he interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker.

In Genesis 41, the cupbearer was the one who told Pharaoh that Joseph could interpret dreams when Pharaoh had a dream of seven fat and seven lean cows. Pharaoh summoned Joseph from the prison and after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream and gave advice, Joseph found favor with Pharaoh. He was appointed as the prime minister of Egypt. Later, in Genesis 45: 4, he assures his brothers that their mishap of selling him into slavery was a divine maneuver by God. He request they return home and bring all family members to Egypt under the safety and comfort afforded by Pharaoh (vs 9-11). Thus, Jacob who was given the name Israel (Gn 32:28), over time becomes a people, not just an extended family in Exodus.



The writer in Exodus 1 recounts how Israel's children multiplied and grew numerous and in the eyes of a new Pharaoh, became a threat, militarily and strategically if they were to ally themselves to other nations. Therefore, Pharaoh put the people under subjugation and carried out infanticide by killing male babies (vs 16) to eliminate reproduction and thus decrease the Israelite population. This plan did not eliminate the liberator that will come under the personage of a man who grew up in Pharaoh's household, Moses. He is seen in Exodus 2 and dominates the rest of the Pentateuch and Israel's legal imagination.<sup>9</sup>

The structure of Exodus moves from a family blessed by God who made provisions for them through Joseph in Egypt, to an enslaved people, who are liberated by God through Moses, and made their departure from Egypt (Ex 1-18). God honored the covenant He made with Abraham (Gn 12) and brought forth a people to become a new nation. It was at their subsequent place of worship on Mt Sinai (Ex 19-40)<sup>10</sup> that God gave new commandments and statutes on how to worship and serve Him.

This text in isolation seems to take on a life of its own. There is the discourse between the chosen man and God. We read about excuses within the backdrop of the Creator, handicap, and disability in the presence of God. In Exodus 4:10-14, Moses makes his excuses to God. It is one of those passages of scripture, which causes headaches and heartaches in the middle of the night. On top of the obvious we have an anthropomorphic portrayal of an angry God who is about to pass judgment on the very person He is about to commission to liberate His people. Within the context of scripture

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<sup>9</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 1521 Kindle.

<sup>10</sup> Gaventa, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 1559.

lies the answer to the angry problem. We see the care and providence provided for Moses all his life, to protect him in the face of Egyptian cruelty. God provided for his safety and security when firstborn males were being murdered by casting them in the Nile River with the approval of Pharaoh (Ex 1:22); we see his own mother hide her baby for three months and when she could no longer hide the child, she placed Moses in a floating ark which was made waterproof and floated down the Nile.

Somehow through the providence of God, Pharaoh's daughter found it. It was the only safe haven in the land of Egypt for a firstborn male Israelite child. Pharaoh's daughter not only secured and comforted this crying baby but without knowing it, provided wages for Moses' mother as she became the one to nurture him (Ex 2:1-9). Moses was instructed in the ways of Egypt for forty years, until he heard the cries of his people in slavery and decided to take matters into his own hands. He killed an Egyptian and buried him in the sand (Ex 2:11-14). Moses' deed was discovered and under threat of death by Pharaoh, fled into the land of the Midianites (Ex 2:15-22). Providence of God protected and secured the life of Moses to eventually be used as the servant of the Most High God. The presence of God at the burning bush appears to be a theophany: a divine appearance of divinity in human or angelic form (a messenger), which also appears in clouds and especially fire (Gn 15:17; Ex 3:2; 19:9; 24:15-18).<sup>11</sup>

### *Literary Context*

Tom Dozeman in his writing: *Methods for Exodus (Methods in Biblical Interpretation)* comments on Terence Fretheim's 1991 commentary on Exodus and

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<sup>11</sup> Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha) 4<sup>th</sup> edition* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010), 86, Kindle.

explains it is a thoroughly literary reading in structure with the rhythm of lament, deliverance, and praise. He shows the interconnections of liturgy and narrative (e.g., Passover festival and Passover story in Exodus 11-12; the Red Sea crossing in Exodus 14 and the people's song of praise in Exodus 15).<sup>12</sup>

Motifs in the early narratives which seem to prefigure later events through repetition are discussed, such as Pharaoh's daughter saves the baby Moses by drawing him out of the water (Ex 2:1-10), prefiguring God's rescue of the Israelites as God draws them out of the water of the Red Sea (Ex 14). God's attack and near killing of Moses and the role of the firstborn son and of blood in protecting Moses (Ex 4:24-26) prefigures the Passover. The Israelites used the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts to protect them from God's attack on all the firstborn sons born in Egypt (Ex 12:21-32).<sup>13</sup> This continuing saga from the end of Genesis with the emergence of God's people, the Israelites in Egypt by divine providence in the life of Joseph (Gn 47:1-6), their troubles with a new Pharaoh that chose not to know the family of Joseph (Ex 1:8) and thus began the cycle of affliction and ultimately out of fear of numbers, and the possibilities of the Israelites becoming their enemies' allies (Ex 1:9-12) led to slavery and oppression. In the truest sense, Moses is not truly home in the household of Pharaoh; he ends up in the desert as a fugitive of justice because of a criminal act of taking the life of an Egyptian (Ex 2:15). Now he ends up with the Midianites, another culture, and a wondering people who live far into the desert and who exemplify rootlessness. We see the appearance of Moses in a positive light in his actions of rescuing the Midianite daughters from the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25, Kindle.

<sup>13</sup> Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus*, 26.

shepherds who mistreat the woman at the well. Moses is received into the Midianite family, marries Zipporah, and has a child, all signs of being welcomed by the Midianites and blessed by God (Ex 1:21).

According to Longman, Exodus is a continuation of Genesis with a narrative structure, which presents the following:

- Part One: Israel in Egypt (1:1-13:16)
- Part Two: Israel in the Wilderness (13:17-18:27)
- Part Three: Israel at Sinai (19:1-40:38).<sup>14</sup>

There is certainly a diversity of genre in the style of writing based upon cultural and traditional implications. According to P. Kyle McCarter Jr. the story of the captivity and escape from Egypt is told most entirely in prose narrative with the institution of worship at Sinai. He also shares the sources of the Pentateuch in the form of the Yahwistic Account (J), Elohist Account (E), Priestly Materials (P), and Deuteronomistic Influence (D).<sup>15</sup> The Yahwistic Account (J) presents the departure from Egypt as a continuation of the theme of the double promise made by Yahweh to the patriarchs. Israel is to become a great nation living in a productive land. The Elohist Account (E) refers to the deity as Yahweh as well as God, so that the use of Yahweh is no longer a reliable indicator of J. In E, God speaks differently by speaking through His actions of plagues instead of speaking audibly to Moses as in J. The Priestly Materials (P) reflects the belief of the Jerusalem priesthood as the Temple cult, with its various rituals and regulations, which originated in the time of Moses and Aaron on the Mountain of

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<sup>14</sup> Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1533.

<sup>15</sup> James L. Mays, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 119.

Sinai. The Deuteronomistic Influence (D) is based upon the parallelism seen in Exodus and Deuteronomy, which reflect Deuteronomistic materials and ideas.<sup>16</sup>

While all these different sources are helpful, the main focus is on P, the Priestly Materials. Here the leader, Moses, is taking on the role of a priest and through Aaron, the priestly lineage of the tribe of Levi. Any of Aaron's descendants who were physically flawed were not to approach the tent or altar. In the excuses that spoke about not being eloquent, slow of speech and tongue (Ex 4:10) Moses knew what it was to be flawed but he would grow in maturity and understanding and later, become the meekest of man. He would become an intercessor or mediator for the people. It is God, in His wisdom, had chosen Moses to be leader, mediator, and representative deliverer, a picture of Jesus Christ to come.

### *Detailed Analysis*

The central theme of oppression of the Israelites in the land of Egypt allows biblical authors to explore salvation as an experience of liberation from slavery. Dozeman further respond by saying, "The true God of their faith is the God who accompanies them in their struggle for liberation from modern tyrants who oppress and repress them as Pharaoh did the Hebrews."<sup>17</sup>

Dozeman describes the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Yahweh, the covenant God that is faithful to past promises by saving Israel and leading them to the

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<sup>16</sup> Mays, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, 120.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Dozeman, "Exodus," *Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 790, Kindle.

Promised Land. His nature and divine power is the centerpiece in the first half of the book and the motivating factor in their liberation.<sup>18</sup>

According to *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, Moses presents at least six immediate complaints to God why he feels this task should be given to another.

1. “Why me?” (3:11).
2. “What name to explain who you are?” (3:13).
3. “They will not believe me” (4:1).
4. “I am slow of speech and of tongue”(4:10).
5. “Request for an assistant”(4:13).
6. “God is blamed”(5:22).<sup>19</sup>

Moses was very familiar with name designation for the many gods in the land of Egypt. Therefore, his questioning of God about His name is necessary. The name that God provided gave a reflection of the one true God who is capable of alleviating any limitation, any restriction, any closed opportunity or crippling circumstance. The Hebrew word used for I Am is: Eheyeh asher Eheyeh, I am the Self-existent One; the Eternal, the One who always has been and always will be (Ps 90:2). This is shortened to I Am here, The Ever-present and Living One. It is equivalent to Jehovah the Eternal, not only the eternal name of God but also the promise of eternal generations of natural people on the earth (3:11-12).<sup>20</sup> Moses’ reluctance comes out of humility and also a form of stubbornness. His initial reluctance is typical of a number of biblical prophets as we see

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<sup>18</sup> Dozeman, “Exodus,” *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, 685-689.

<sup>19</sup> Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Publishing, Inc., 1999), 108-112.

<sup>20</sup> Dake, *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, 108.

in Jeremiah, and, in an extreme form, Jonah.<sup>21</sup> Upon gathering information from the ESV Study Bible it seems to indicate that Moses raised a relevant concern. If he is going to address Pharaoh and his court, there must be eloquence and clear communication when speaking to what is considered a god of Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Yet, his faith and trust in Jehovah God should have been stimulated by: the burning bush (3:2), the voice of God (3:5, 6), the rod turning into a serpent (4:2), the leprous hand (4:6), and water turning into blood (4:9).

In our pericope (Ex 4:10-12) Moses uses the following words to describe to God his preconceived self-evaluation as slow of speech and of tongue, an exaggerated summation of his communication skills. In the major translations, the words are essentially the same. In the New Living Translation there is a slight variation: But Moses pleaded with the Lord, “O Lord, I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.” (Ex 4:10). In the *Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB)* it states:

And Moshe said unto Hashem, O Adonoi, I am not an ish devarim, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy eved; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow lashon (Shemot 4:10-12 OJB).

The words ish devarim means, “I have never been a man of words.” The *Douay-Rheims 1899* instead of slow of speech it uses the word impediment. The Amplified Bible not only uses the word not eloquent but also combines the word not fluent. These translations show a slight variation in areas in which there is emphasis. The word impediment seems to be a dominate word of disability rather than the word not fluent or slow of speech,

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<sup>21</sup> *Collins Bible Dictionary*, 29273.

<sup>22</sup> Lane T. Dennis *English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001), 150.

which gives the idea of being one who can communicate but not up to the standard of one's peers.

Might I add another point to consider along with fear and faithlessness expressed by Moses, it is what R. J. Rushdoony calls a broken man. The early vim, vigor, and vitality on a young Moses, his zeal and impetuosity in breaking with the courts and defending his people seems to indicate that the years has taken a toll on his self-confidence. Rusdoony says for this reason God now uses him. Our salvation begins with an accepted judgment; only then are we freed from the past, men who seek to excuse or to explain their past can never escape it.<sup>23</sup> The response from God to Moses is given after several objections and subsequently leading to his commission. According to scripture, God uses anthromorphic words to describe His anger and discuss with Moses' excuses. This does not negate the words of our Creator, but it helps us to further understand His frustration with a man who has the source of creation and perfection before him and yet is hesitant. Could it be that Moses thought about the way he left Egypt? How he departed with blood on his hands and the Egyptian army in hot pursuit? After forty years, to Moses it was probably as vivid as yesterday. God's reply "Who made your mouth?" The *New Living Translation* interacts:

Then the Lord asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say" (Ex 4:11).

Such a profound statement puzzles me, not because I was not aware of God's creative ability or His profound power and authority. I am puzzled because deep inside I did not expect God to actually say the things in Exodus 4:11. Is He speaking out of anger

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<sup>23</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *Exodus: Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, vol. 2 (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2004), 1031, 1042.



in response to Moses's inept faithlessness and fear? Is He speaking out of Moses lack of trust? Is He speaking out of pure frustration after showing Moses all the signs and wonders as he apparently tries to relieve himself of the burden of leadership. The NASV translation does not only include Moses but all of humanity by saying: "Who made Man's mouth?" This conversation has inclusivity and exclusivity. Why is this so important? And what does it speak to those who are in the category of the deaf, dumb, sightless? What word of encouragement is available for those who find themselves in this state? According to Harper Collins Commentary this whole entry was not an item to be discussed. It was identified as slow of speech and slow of tongue. The commentator proceeded to say that Yahweh's solution is to assign Moses's brother Aaron to be his spokesman, with no mention of Yahweh's response to Moses's comment about being slow to speak.<sup>24</sup> Yet, Arthur Pink gives clarification and insight to this pericope by stating that those who are being trained in the leadership role should not rely solely upon rhetoric and elocution as a pre-requisite for effective ministry and leadership as though men can be persuaded by men's wisdom. He further states:

Have we forgotten those words of the apostle Paul, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God" (1 Cor 2:1).<sup>25</sup>

On the question of creative disability Pink declares:

It seems evident from this that, in the previous verse, Moses was referring to some impediment in his speech. In reply, the Lord tells him that he was responsible to that. The force of what Jehovah said here seems to be this: As all the physical senses, and the perfections of them, are from the Creator, so are the imperfections

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<sup>24</sup> Mays, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Gleaning in Exodus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 37-38.

of them according to His sovereign pleasure. Behind the law of heredity is the lawgiver, regulating it as He deems best...<sup>26</sup>

This is significant because our weakness becomes a spiritual anchor for strength. Our growth in the Lord seems to gravitate to those weak points, which do not make sense in a worldview built upon perfection and exactness in beauty, intelligence, and physical and mental acumen. Notice what God does in the case of Moses, he makes accommodations (which I believe springs forth from grace and mercy), that includes God becoming Moses' mouth piece, and teacher (4:12), and the inclusion of his brother Aaron as the communication specialist for Moses, to ensure the commission will be carried out.

How are we to address such a profound statement, which comes from the lips of our Creator, our life giver, and our reason for existence? What implications are given? What is there in this verse for autism, disabilities, mental and physical, blind, lame, and those incapable of helping themselves? A close reading of the text reveals an imperfection in Moses, which could infer disability. If Moses could change the situation he would but it is not within his power or authority to make the change. His change would only be cosmetic and without the Creator's support would lead to utter failure.

Terence Fretheim in his *Exodus Commentary* says:

This encounter raises a number of theological issues. First, it reveals something significant about God's calling to "ministry." God does not call perfect individuals to leadership positions among God's people. God calls people to tasks with, as they say, "warts and all." It's not the case, however that human giftedness is irrelevant to God, as if every could do equally in any calling, simply because He is able to work in and through them...Theoretically, then, Moses' objection would not be irrelevant, but in this case it is beside the point. God knows perfectly well what Moses' gifts are and is still his choice ...<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Pink, *Gleaning in Exodus*, 38-39.

<sup>27</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 72,73, Kindle.

This verse leads us to the thought and intent of Creator God. It could lead to the sovereignty and providence of God in the lives of every individual. It leads also to second guessing God as to our meaning and quality of life. For the angry who wish to find a means of escape because of their condition or the condition of their family members this verse will suffice, but for those who are seriously and prayerfully seeking answers to the situations that occur in life, this verse will also suffice. First, God says this is not an original sin scenario, as was expressed in John 9:1-3, where Jesus declared about this blind man's condition which was not the results of sin in his life or his parents but that the works of God might be displayed in him. There are so many limitations to the knowledge and wisdom of man compared to the infinite wisdom of God. God shares with us what He wishes to share and He conceals at certain times what He wishes to conceal. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Is 55: 8-9 AMP), other parallel scriptures include: Psalms 40:5, 147:5; Job 38:35, 36; Proverbs 3:5,6; Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28.

What role does providence and sovereignty play in the summation of our text? Are those words spoken by God to Moses, fall within the context of this passage only or is it a window into the awesome creative power of the Lord? Do those words come forth from a God who sees His leader slipping in his assessment of God's ability to sustain and support? According to the Bible Dictionary, providence is the notion that there is a benevolent and purposeful ordering for all events of history and there is a cosmic plan to the universe, a beneficial reason for everything. The biblical view is that God the Creator

was personally responsible for preserving and regulating the created order. In this context, providence could be related to notion of election and predestination, which is an emphasis of a divine predetermination of human destiny in conformity with an eternal plan.<sup>28</sup>

Unger in his explanation of sovereignty of God, says it is a term which expressed the supreme rulership of God which is considered not one of the attributes of God but a prerogative based upon the perfections of the divine Being. Unger says this sovereignty is a necessary part of the proper conception of God, and is abundantly declared in the scripture:

- A Psalm of Asaph. The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, and summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting (Ps 50:1 NASB).
- He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves (Ps 66:7 NASB).
- The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. (Ps 93: 1 NASB).
- Isaiah 40:15, 17; 1 Timothy 6:15 and Revelation 11:17.<sup>29</sup>

John Calvin's definition has variation, which includes "absolute sovereignty, which means the sovereign election of a certain number to salvation and the sovereign reprobation of others."<sup>30</sup>

Justo Gonzalez further explains Huldrych Zwingli the Swiss reformer's position on providence:

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<sup>28</sup> *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 36700, 36051.

<sup>29</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1977), 1041.

<sup>30</sup> Unger, *Unger Bible Dictionary*, 1041-42.

Zwingli's notion of God is closely connected with the notion of the absolute. His arguments for monotheism are based not so much on Scripture as on the claim that the existence of more than one absolute being is a logical impossibility. Therefore, the biblical assertion that all things are in God is to be taken very literally, meaning "that nothing is hidden from Him, nothing unknown to Him, nothing beyond His reach, nothing disobedient to Him." The mosquito's sting has been foreknown and foreordained by God, and to ask why God made this and other seemingly evil things is "a vain and useless feminine [!] curiosity." All that we can do about God's creation, with its seeming contradictions, is to accept it and believe that all these things are done on the basis of a plan that God's infinite wisdom has not wished to reveal to us. Thus the doctrine of providence as here expounded is not merely the affirmation that we can trust God for our sustenance and well being, but also the assertion that the relationship between God and the world is such that everything takes place through the will of God.<sup>31</sup>

It is from this perspective that Zwingli approaches the doctrine of predestination, "for the whole business of predestination, free will, and merit rests upon this matter of providence." God not only knows all things, but also does all things, for "secondary causes are not properly called causes," and God alone is the primary cause of all things. To deny this, would be to deny the very nature of God, as even the pagan philosophers knew anything less than absolute predeterminism would impinge on the sovereignty and wisdom of God.<sup>32</sup>

In light of the writings of Zwingli and others, I have come to the conclusion that this forum of discussion is a very difficult portion to handle; it will take time to ponder and digest based upon individual circumstances and situations. There is no easy resolve to such an emotional dynamic as sovereignty and providence. We are very much aware that a caring God is the one in control and His attributes help to guide our steps of understanding and support.

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<sup>31</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History Of Christian Thought From The Protestant Reformation To The Twentieth Century* vol. 3 (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 63, Kindle.

<sup>32</sup> González, *A History Of Christian Thought*, 63-65.

The words of Martin Luther give credence to the subject matter:

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works... There is a twofold knowledge of God: the general and the particular. All men have the general knowledge, namely, that God is, that He has created heaven and earth, that He is just, that He punishes the wicked, etc. But what God thinks of us, what He wants to give and to do to deliver us from sin and death and to save us—which is the particular and the true knowledge of God—this men do not know. Thus it can happen that someone's face may be familiar to me but I do not really know him, because I do not know what he has in his mind. So it is that men know naturally that there is a God, but they do not know what He wants and what He does not want.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, God uses this narrative with the leader of Israel to show each of us case by case His decisiveness in pointing out His sovereignty even in the most sorrowful situation. His creative power and His liberating power in the case of His covenant people and His people over-shadowed with autism and other disabilities. He has the power to remove the impediments. If He chooses to allow the disability to remain, though He is capable to remove it but He has a greater purpose in our lives and the lives of our autistic loved one, and what is that purpose one may ask? As you and God walk alone on the journey of life, His individual revelation for you will crystalize according to His divine will and indescribable sovereignty.

### **New Testament**

Our pericope (1 Cor 12:15-26) implicitly addresses the problem of disability under the heading of feebleness and uncomely parts. In our Old Testament pericope, Jehovah God points out His creative power as the main source of what is considered

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<sup>33</sup> Gonzalez, *A History of Christian thought*, chapter 4.

healthy individuals as well as disabled individuals. He does not at this point tell us why but with the corroboration of other scriptures as mentioned earlier in John 9:1-7; Isaiah 55:8, 9 and some other references:

- Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done, And Your thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, They would be too numerous to count. (PS 40:5 NASB).
- Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite (PS 147:5 NASB).
- Can you send forth lightning that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’”? “Who has put wisdom in the innermost being or given understanding to the mind? (Jb 38:35-36 NASB).
- Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. 6In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Prv 3:5-6 NASB).
- For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope (Jer 29:11 NASB).
- And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28 NASB).

We are not left in a state of helplessness in regard to the question why as we make the leap from the Old Testament economy to the entrance of the incarnate (Jn 1:14), His life, His miracles, His establishment of His Church (Mt 16:18), His passion (1 Cor 15:3-8), His commission to the Church which represents His body in a spiritual sense (Acts 1:8) and His calling of Apostle Paul (Acts 9: 1-16). Paul eventually established the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey (15:36 -18:22). Not only do we see the compassion of Christ as He tabernacle among us but we also see His marvelous and wonderful miracles. In the inspired writings of Paul, we see how God relates the gifts to the church (1 Cor 12, 13, 14) and the duties and responsibilities which accompany those

gifts, the attitude one must maintain, and because it is pertaining to our subject in a most meaningful way, how the church must address disabilities. Paul points out that which is sometimes kept in silence. It is human nature to advance that, which appears to be obvious success and put less emphasis on that which, on the surface, appears as a hindrance to our goal. Paul does not overlook that which is unappealing. It is our aspiration that this work will present a clear picture of Paul's intent as it relates to that part of the body of Christ, which is sometimes overlooked, patronized, and ignored.

### *Historical-Cultural Context*

According to Mark Powell, Paul the Apostle was the most effective missionary of early Christianity and the most prominent of the church's early theologians. Almost half of the books of the New Testament are attributed to him.<sup>34</sup> He was both controversial and persuasive and the reason he wrote so many letters because of the arguments that would ensue. One of the reasons we still have those letters is that his views usually prevailed.<sup>35</sup> Powell further states in addressing the life of Paul:

Paul alludes to various aspects of his life in key portions of his undisputed letters: his upbringing (Phil 3:4-6); his calling (Gal 1:13-17); his trips to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18-2:14); his ministry (1 Thes 2:1-12); and his hardships (1 Cor 11:23-29... Whenever Paul reflects upon his birth and upbringing, he emphasizes his Jewish identity (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:4-6). He does not say when or where he was born, but he does say that he was circumcised on the eighth day of his life, as was traditional among devout Jews. He was born and raised as "a member of the people of Israel," as a "descendant of Abraham," and, specifically, as a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He is proud to identify himself as a Hebrew born of Hebrews" and, indeed, as a Pharisee. He maintains that he

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1989), 5412, Kindle.

<sup>35</sup> Powell, 33303, Kindle.



observed the Jewish law in a manner that was “blameless” and that he “advanced in Judaism” beyond many of his peers.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, in his humility Paul said he counted all these things a waste that he might win others to Christ (Phil 3:7:14). Most scholars believe according to scripture that Apostle Paul is the writer of Corinthians. Achtemeier with the corroboration of other scholars point out that Paul must have written 1 Corinthians, shortly after he had left Corinth and apparently, gone to Ephesus (Acts 19:1), and no earlier than 53 A.D. He also stated that Corinth had been conquered and destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and lay in ruins for over a century. Julius Caesar refined it in 44 B.C. as a colony for retired veterans of Roman legions, which infused Greco-Roman culture up to the time of Paul.<sup>37</sup> The city was a trade route with rich commerce passing through which would bring in outsiders particularly many sailors because of the incoming and outgoing ships at the ports. Achtemeier says like any town, ancient or modern where sailors congregated, certain characteristics emerged, among them women of easy virtue. He further states:

The upward social mobility conferred by large amounts of money, the athletic spectacles, the love of parties, the problems created by a loosening sexual limits, the desire to be as inclusive as possible in religious beliefs and practices, the desire to include social customs from secular life into the Christian communities, all of these give to the problems discussed in the Corinthian correspondence an immediacy not always present in ethical discussions contained in the New Testament letters.<sup>38</sup>

Take into consideration the many traditional Greco-Roman gods that were well represented in religious sites and activities. According to DeSilva, the many gods Paul

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<sup>36</sup> Powell, 33328, Kindle.

<sup>37</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament; Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 329, 334.

<sup>38</sup> Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, 329.

referred to in 1 Corinthians 8:5 (For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords (NASB)) were very visible in the city. There was no distinction between religion and secular life, no separation of church and state, as it were. Traditional Greco-Roman religion undergirded most aspects of society and the gods also stood behind earthly rulers and authority, through whom they manifested their favor. Each divinity was held to watch over the city, the guild, and the family especially devoted to its providential care.<sup>39</sup> It would appear that Paul met in Corinth the missionaries Prisca and Aquila, who had been expelled from Rome by Claudius (A.D. 49). Paul joined them not only in their workshop as a leather worker, but also in their missionary endeavors, which carried out in their house-church and considered to be the originating center of Corinthian community. According to the Book of Acts, Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half. He was brought before the proconsul Gallio, probably in the fall of 51 or spring of 52 after being accused of violating Jewish law. Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew who was converted by Prisca and Aquila in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28), continued the mission in Corinth after Paul's departure.<sup>40</sup>

Within the framework of this new thriving, immature church, Paul faced many dangers, which could threaten the fellowship. Among them which is pointed out by DeSilva were divisions within the church over the teacher to whom they were most closely attached (1 Cor 1:11-13; 3:5, 21-23), the use of secular courts to win honor and damages at the expense of other Christians (1 Cor 6:1-8), replication of the hierarchy of

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<sup>39</sup> David DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts Methods & Ministry Formation* (Madison, WI: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 558.

<sup>40</sup> James L. Mays, *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2000), 1074.

social status at the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the rich provided for themselves a form of dinner with the poor uninvited (1 Cor 11:17-31). And the crux of our discussion, the church at Corinth had a major problem, because of their hierarchy and status driven superiority led to the competitive measuring of spiritual gifts and the use of a charismatic endowment as the means or the measurement to boast about one's status in the community (1 Cor 12-14).<sup>41</sup>

Thus, our pericope becomes not only the centerpiece of discussion but the catalyst to understanding the function of the church that is the body of Christ in the world today as it relates to disabilities and what is called weakness within the context of this writing. Paul is clear as to his reasoning and his expectations of the body, but he is facing a mountain of opposition to his admonishments and explanations. His inspired word is rich in portraying the love and the gift of Christ as he tenderly corrects and directs their attention away from themselves and towards the meaning of the gifts, the intent of Christ as it relates to the gifts and their role in securing the gift in gratitude and service to the feeble ones within the framework of the body of Christ.

### *Literary Context*

One of the major issues concerning the Corinthian correspondence is the number of letters Paul wrote to the Christians in that city, and how much of that correspondence we still possess. According to Achtemeier, not only did Paul write to the Corinthians; they wrote to him (1 Cor 7:1), which posed a number of questions for him to answer (1 Cor 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 566.

<sup>42</sup> Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, 332-333.

Mays purports the general structure begins with greetings followed by a thanksgiving (1 Cor 1-9) and ends with final greetings (1 Cor 16:20-24), which is influenced by early Christian liturgical language. The main body of the letter consists of Paul's arguments, probably in response to the written question and oral information.<sup>43</sup> It is evident from the letters sent and received that Apostle Paul dealt with a more difficult group of believers. A major theme because of divisions in the church appears to be church unity. Paul uses words such as jealousy and quarreling (1 Cor 3:3). To help the young church learn and understand the importance of temperance in the flesh, Paul expresses how important for them to recognize their bodies as the temple of God, the place where the Holy Spirit dwells in them and the church community (1 Cor 3:16-17). It is the same Spirit, which distributes unity in the form of gifts to the body of Christ. Paul shows the church in metaphorical examples how the body of Christ is affected by isolated goals and ambitions and selfish actions because of the factions in the church. A unified entity become the platform for resolve and reconciliation which enhances the atmosphere for change within the context of what is considered the feeble part of the body of Christ. Paul points to the necessity of the feeble part (12:22), the affirmation of the feeble part by God (12:18) honoring the feeble part (12:24) the uniting factor of the feeble part (12:25) within the context of the body of Christ.

Paul's rhetoric is a combination of epistolary in context, eschatological as it presents a picture of future events, doxological in its conclusion and paraenesis in its ethical remarks and response. His persuasive writing appeals to the head as well as to the

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<sup>43</sup> Mays, *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, 1074.

heart; Paul also speaks from a fatherly perspective. A quote from Ben Witherington's writings says:

I would argue that the rhetorical forms of Paul's letter are more revealing of what Paul's letters are actually about than the epistolary forms and elements. In fact, I would argue that rhetorical forms more determine the structures of these documents than do the epistolary forms, especially if one looks beyond and between the prescript and the postscript.<sup>44</sup>

Michael Gorman describes the writings of Paul as countercultural and multicultural. The formation of the church (Gk *ekklesia*) the body of Christ is countercultural in the sense that it embraces the values of its true Savior and Lord, Jesus the crucified and resurrected Messiah.<sup>45</sup> Thus, instead of being proponents of their own culture, it professes, the story of the Lord Jesus in whom the church exists and who lives within the assembly. Gorman continues:

This countercultural community is not produced by human effort, nor does it occur to perfection overnight; it is a process of divine activity and communal and personal transformation (e.g., Rom 12:1-2; 1 Thes 3:11-13; 5:23-28). To be holy is to be different, different from those outside the church and different from the way we used to be, changed from what was "then" to what is "now" (Gal 4:8-9; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Eph 2:1-6; Col 3:1-7).<sup>46</sup>

In the area of multicultural, Gorman uses the example of Dr. Martin Luther King's definition of what he called beloved community, where differences of race, ethnicity, class, and gender do not divide but unite in the love of God.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ben Witherington, III *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 123.

<sup>45</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Paul* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Companions Publishers, 2008), 131-132, Kindle.

<sup>46</sup> Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 133-134.

<sup>47</sup> Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 135.

If we could possibly extend the multicultural motif—race, ethnicity, class, and gender—to include people with disabilities, mentally and physically challenged, and autism, we would move a step further toward the unity depicted in Paul’s writings. A bridge to this thinking is used by Paul in calling those who have made the step beyond countercultural and multicultural barriers is the use of the words, brothers and sisters, with the belief we are descendants, or children, of Abraham by faith and thus also as children of God (Gal 3:23-29) and also with the use of the practice known to the people as adoption. We are to enjoy heirship as God’s children the result of which is full access to the Father’s inheritance by sharing with the elder Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:12-17).<sup>48</sup>

### *Detailed Analysis*

Leading up to our pericope (1 Cor 12: 20-25), Apostle Paul has shown a practical approach: “Brethren, I would not have that ye should be ignorant (10:1)...all things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient...(10:23).” When speaking of the Lord’s Supper, the understanding and significance was lost in the hierarchy of the church. Paul addressed the problem by saying “Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not for the better, but for the worse. First of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it... this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper... for in eating everyone taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken” (11:17, 18a, 20b, 21).

Within the structure of our pericope, there seems to be a conciliatory tone as he metaphorically describes the functionality of the body of Christ as it relates to the gifts of

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<sup>48</sup> Gorman, *Reading Paul*, 135-136.

the Holy Spirit. It is both anticipatory and didactic in his approach. He shows the church community at Corinth the unity and diversity found within the framework of the Holy Spirit (12:4-7). It is that same Spirit that unifies and sets in order the proper sequences of events which fortifies and strengthens the body of Christ, the church.

Paul also anticipates and counters what some scholars call an overemphasis upon glossolalia or speaking in tongues, and judging from the amount of space devoted to tongues, I believe it was the most highly sought after and expressed gift within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12-14). It is safe to conclude that the church at Corinth thought very highly of the gift of tongues, but everyone did not have the gift (12:30), and it is a distinct possibility that those who had the gift may have thought of themselves as being superior to those who did not. In the true order of the gifts, the greatest of the gifts would be love, and the least would be tongues and at the same time affirming all are necessary elements within the body of Christ (12:1).<sup>49</sup> Paul is also expressing mutuality rather than hierarchy and seemingly reverses the ancient political rhetoric of that day by showcasing the least organ within the body and downplaying what is considered the more impressive parts. It is a paradox, the rationale of Paul, and the working of the Holy Spirit, but it is in direct line with other scriptures, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1:27).

Paul shows the necessity of each and every part within the body, the parts that are not seen (12:13-14), and the parts that are seen (12:15-17). His argument for the body is enlightening and understandable. One can see the logic and the spiritual reasoning

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<sup>49</sup> Michael D. Googan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010), 2016, Kindle.

displayed in his argument. Notice how easily he says how necessary that part of the body is that is considered unimportant and that which appears to be feeble (v 22). This unimportant part is just as necessary as any part in the body of Christ. The key words used by Paul who points to what others anticipate and state is a maladjusted body part is depicted in the following terms: feeble, less honorable, uncomely parts. Feeble, as an adjective it is lacking physical strength, especially as a result of age or illness. In synonym terms, the expression is weak, frail, infirm, delicate, sickly, ailing, debilitated, incapacitated, faint, dim, subdued, and muted, palsied, doddering. The term less honorable is one who is incapable of bringing honor to him or her by actions or by physical or mental capacity. One who has not distinguished himself or herself because of limitations; and the term uncomely, which is used to describe in a rather archaic way, a form of ugliness, unsightly, unattractive, unhandsome, inelegant, disfigured, defaced, blotted, blemished, marred, cacophonous.<sup>50</sup> Can we not put those who are autistic, sufferers of Down's Syndrome, Asperger's Syndrome, Alzheimer's; the elderly, the bedridden, the deformed, under this category of the feeble? These definitions of the prescribed words represent all that is brash about humanity and our superiority over that which appears to be weak. Yet Paul, after presenting this debilitating idea about that which is feeble in the body, does a remarkable thing by saying these parts are needful, these parts are necessary, these parts are honorable. How is it possible for a weak and sickly part of the body of Christ to be necessary and important? Here again we are anticipating and reflecting from human knowledge instead of divine wisdom (Is 55:8, 9).

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<sup>50</sup> Robert L. Chapman, *Roget's International Thesaurus*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 126.18, 899.6.



In letting the text speak, our answers will be clarified. In the Revised Standard Version, instead of the word comely and uncomely (vs 23, 24), the words less presentable and more presentable is used; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable (v 24). There is an anticipation of support of the body as well as divine intervention from the Holy Spirit. The New International Version uses the words: indispensable and special modesty. “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment (vs 23, 24).” The Revised Standard Version lists the term inferior part to describe the weaker member of the body (v 24). *J. B. Phillips New Testament* translation gives a slight variation, but a wonderful clarification to our portion of our pericope with the following:

On the contrary, those parts of the body which have no obvious function are the more essential to health: and to those parts of the body which seem to us to be less deserving of notice we have to allow the highest honor of function. The parts which do not look beautiful have a deeper beauty in the work they do, while the parts which look beautiful may not be at all essential to life! But God has harmonized the whole body by giving importance of function to the parts which lack apparent importance that the body should work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another (vs. 21-25).

Beverly Gaventa makes a valid point about the body of Christ by saying:

Paul extends the metaphor to stress not just the interrelated nature of the body’s members, but their utter lack of choice in the matter: the members can dissociate neither themselves (12:15-16) nor others (12:21) from the body, since “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose” (12:18). This fits well with Paul’s view of “gifts” discussed in above (12:4-6); they are given by

God at the discretion of the Spirit, not according to the whims, accomplishments, or even agency of the believers.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, in examining Gaventa's statement, our input in the matter of the body of Christ is not needed nor is it necessary, for the body of Christ has its Founder who died on the cross to secure our position within the body. Through His wisdom and divine attributes in Him and Him alone, completes the structure and distributes what is necessary for support and assistance. I believe what is required of us within this organism is simply compliance. This compliance consists of prayerfully seeking the will of God and dutifully carrying out that will for the ecumenical development of the unity in the body.

Paul expresses synergistically the functionality and the unity, which is encapsulated through the Spirit of Christ in the body of Christ, the church. He takes their superiority attitude filled with status quo and shows them the importance of the unseen and the uncared. He expresses the necessity of each and every member, in spite of our apathetic assessment of what is important and what is valuable. He points the way for the church at Corinth to picture the completeness of each part of the body in Christ. Paul says there are reasons for divinity helping us to reflect properly of the values and the importance of such profound statements. There is a kind of symbiosis between the various parts within the body, which makes us inextricably attached to each other. If I neglect the weaker part, I am neglecting myself, if I uphold and support the weaker part; I am upholding and supporting myself. My attachment to the body of Christ was the mind and making of Christ, therefore, because I have chosen Him, I cannot walk away from what He has chosen for me. How can I neglect that which the Lord deems as important

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<sup>51</sup> Beverly R. Gaventa, *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 30924, Kindle.

and necessary? The more concentration on helping the weak, the better the body feels.

Why are the feeble necessary, because it does several things within the church community:

1. It counteracts selfishness (12:14-16), and discord (12:25).
2. It brings a sense of purpose and caring (12:25-26), because in a way that is totally known to the Lord it pleases Him to have every one of the participants in the body of Christ to be respectful and unified which destroys schisms in the body.
3. Another element to consider is suffering. Paul is very familiar with suffering from a traveling aspect and his turmoil externally (2 Cor 11:25-27): Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.

Paul also dealt with internal pain in the form of the thorn in the flesh. There are speculations as to what it purports to be. We do know it was an actual physical and painful malady of the flesh situated in the body (2 Cor 12:8-10). Paul addresses his thorn in the flesh as something the Lord might want to attend to since He has the power to alleviate Paul's problem, so he asked the Lord three times to remove the thorn. All three times, he asked, "Remove the thorn," but no reply. The Lord said in effect there is something to be learned from suffering and pain that will, "if patiently learned and analyzed will lead to a more mature believer."

What about Christ's suffering? When I think of the pain to see my granddaughter struggling in this life, and the many medications that need to be administered and adjusted, the many mood swings from joy to sorrow, my expectation for her life and all that means for me, her quality of life and all it means to her and how it leads to

understanding, her frustration with what we would consider the simplest tasks; compare my interaction with my granddaughter to the rugged, excruciating pain and humiliation of Christ and the cross, there is no comparison. Especially when considering the cross was not necessary for Christ, it was necessary for us. Jesus suffered for us. He gave his life for us. No human being on the face of this earth could understand what agony accompanied Him, yet His love is the deciding factor in our redemption, and it is the unifying factor in the body of Christ.

### **Summary**

I have presented the two pericope, which seem to address the problem of autism. The Old Testament scripture shows the limited power and ability of a man commissioned by God. It also shows the unlimited power and ability of Jehovah God. Moses is overwhelmed by his inability to articulate and communicate and God's response to him is "All ability and inability is a product of my creative ability." God does not back away from the statement or sidestep the implications; He makes this bold statement and continues in concert with directive for Moses. I have discovered an all wise and powerful God does not perform actions of happenstance, everything He does is perfect and exact because of His complete and perfect attributes of justice and mercy. I may not know all the circumstances regarding each and every situation of disabilities and autisms but I know there is a God who knows and cares. This God will, through faith allow us one day, to know not just the whys to all our lives and the lives of our loved ones but the how as well.

The New Testament scripture touches upon the present circumstances of being a part of the body of Christ, within the context of the community of believers. I perceive the described feebleness, weakness, comeliness, and muted part of the body, could underline many different maladies and encompass many disabilities. I have chosen to emphasize the community of autism. It fits the criteria of our pericope as the weaker part but also an important part.

The combination of these two scriptures gives a sense of hope and perceived collaboration among the church community. The didactic instructions clarify our duties and responsibilities within the body, and God's divine providence gives assurance He will bring everything to its proper conclusion and fulfillment.

There are others who have grappled with this topic and I am grateful for their input, and expertise, yet I believe my story will touch a significant part of the body of Christ because of my personal interest and experiences. Some will find similarities in my writing that will relate to their story. I believe the church community within the context will be enhanced through the research and insight. No longer will autism be something to whisper to your neighbor, but will become an intricate part of a discussion of helping, caring, and sharing. In each case, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit aid in the deciphering process for individuals as well as communities. It is His Spirit, which gives unity out of diversity; it is His Spirit which makes the most obstinate group abandon their stance of narcissism and status importance, to the will and providence of an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful God. The greatest aspect of these scripture points to love as the key ingredient (1 Cor 13), faith and hope follow closely behind.

I accentuate faith because in spite of what I perceive and see, it is faith that helps us through the dark days of sorrow and despair. It is faith, which makes the breakthrough when there seems to be a moment of anger and depression. Faith lifts our spirits and hope reminds us of better days in Christ.

And because these feeble parts of the body are truly a part of the body, the body has no other choice but to help, share and care for the weaker parts because it pleases Christ, and because we who are part of the body have not choice about the matter. It was the Lord who placed us in the body; it is the Lord who distributed the gifts. It is the Lord who made it possible for all of us to be in the family of God. Therefore, to please the Lord, we must love the feeble.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Within the area of autism which I think is a rather modern designation which has its roots in the term disability, emerges a disturbing trend which permeates the landscape of the United States and other countries, and that is the amalgamation of all disabled into what is considered the house of woe. Warehoused among the many are the chronic insane, maniacs, destitute women, some with illegitimate children, innocent paupers, and tubercular people from slums, cripples, blind orphans, and even a temporary house for the deceased.

It is with much irony in such a setting springs forth a woman who is considered one of the most renowned educators in the world. Her name is Anne Sullivan Macy. It is recorded in history, on stage, and on screen of her ability and talent in assisting a young girl named Helen Keller to become the most notable woman with disabilities for Helen was deaf, dumb, and blind. Through her trained insight and God given ability, Anne overcame the crippling barriers of defense that Helen placed in her way and she became known as the Miracle Worker.

We can ask the question how it is possible for two individuals who live in separate parts of the nation, to find each other at the right possible time to become a wonder in the eyes of the world. It is our aim to adequately present the picture of despair,

which encapsulated state warehousing of the disabled and the poor which is evident among most societal experiences across the centuries but for this paper our emphasis will focus on the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is our aim to parallel the life of Anne Sullivan Macy with Helen Keller with a look at Anne's earlier challenges she faced as a child, with her brother being placed in the same institution for over ten years, chronicle her thoughts and her actions as it relates to her childhood, and her begging a philanthropist for help in order to become educated. This leads us to our contemporary society by giving thought to how are we different today from the medical profession of yesterday, how different is our church community as we wrestle with the problems and the solutions of today's social, psychological, medical and ecclesiological institutions.

There are bright pictures, which emerge out of recorded images of despair and Anne Sullivan Macy meets that category. Her will to survive and persevere in the face of insurmountable odds, her persistence in struggling through what is considered by some as the last, the least, and the lost gives fiber and character to her life. We know that she rarely spoke about those days. She gives new meaning to hope, faith, and trust. She becomes my historical foundational platform not simply because of her fantastic work with Helen Keller, but because she had disabilities of a physical, financial, psychological, and communal nature she had to overcome and out of her disabilities she is able to help and assist others.

### **Anne Sullivan's Earlier Years**

Anne was born in a town call Feeding Hills, Massachusetts in 1866. Her parents, Thomas and Alice, appear in the historical records when they brought Anne, who was



their first born, to the St Michael's Cathedral in Springfield, Massachusetts for baptism into a distinctly Irish Catholic community. According to Kim Nielsen, the Sullivan family had three children, Anna (b. 1866), Ellen (b. 1867), and James (b. 1869). Between 1870 and 1872, according to the 1870 census Ellen died, and infant son John was born and died, on dates that remain uncertain. In 1873, Alice gave birth to Mary, who was also carried to the Catholic cathedral in Springfield for baptism.<sup>1</sup>

Anne's description of memories before the tragedy of being placed in Tewksbury Almshouse at ten years old along with her brother Jimmie, who was four years old on February 22, 1876. Nielsen gives the pathos of Anne's words:

Embedded in the memories Macy left us of her childhood are the cycles of agriculture and community. She remembered hog killings and the crowds of people—adults and children—who gathered to labor. In one place this seems a fond memory of games, chaos, cousins, and neighbors; in another her “horror of dead things” causes her to “hide all day” during the “repulsive performance.” Her cousins, she remembered, “took fiendish delight” in chasing her while dangling recently decapitated chickens; an “old, gnarled golden-sweet apple tree at the end of the house... Barns were places for children to play, with ladders, lofts, and horses. “We children,” she remembered, “could tie ourselves up in the stalls and play that we were horses; she loved riding horses...”<sup>2</sup>

Nielsen also makes note of Anne's problem with her eyes which could be the reason she did not attend school until later. She had acquired trachoma, a highly contagious disease most prevalent in impoverished communities, where personal hygiene is difficult. It is thought that exposure to the bacterium cause inflammation and scar tissue to develop in the eye, particularly on the inside of the eyelid, the blinking and rubbing of which then creates additional scar tissue which creates impaired eyesight and discomfort, severe pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Remarkable life of Ann Sullivan Macy and Her Extraordinary Friendship with Helen Keller* (Boston, MS: Beacon Press, 2009), 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Nielson, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 4-5.

In Anne's memory she overheard someone say, "She would be so pretty if it were not for her eyes."<sup>3</sup>

The tragedy of her life began to take fruition because of several factors. In 1874, when Annie was eight years old her mother died of tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in the United States through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The disease ignored geography; class, race, and age cause an astounding one out of every five deaths from 1800 to 1870. It was known at that time as consumption, because the body was literally consumed by the disease.<sup>4</sup> Then, her father's trouble with alcoholism, which accelerated after the death of his wife, led to the abandonment of his children and with the apathy of relatives, led to their entrance into the world of the asylum. The place was Massachusetts State Almshouse at Tewksbury or Tewksbury almshouse. On February 22, 1876, Annie characterized these years as "a crime against childhood because she felt abandoned by her family terrified and bewildered she and her four year old brother Jimmie lived in a place for mentally ill, diseased, prostitutes and the homeless. Years later after being interviewed about her existence in the place of complete chaos, Nella Brady Henney wrote, "she has spent her life since the age of fourteen trying to forget what happened up to that time."<sup>5</sup> Nielsen, in trying to explain the complexity of this institution and others made this distinct observation:

The Massachusetts social welfare system Annie Sullivan entered led the nation in size, institutional development, and bureaucracy. In what one historian has called a "major landmark in the history of American welfare," in 1863 the state had bought numerous almshouses, residential schools for blind and deaf children, asylums for those considered insane, state prisons, and public hospitals under the

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<sup>3</sup> Nielson, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Nielson, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 14.

direction of the Massachusetts State Board of Charities. Led by reformer Franklin B Sanborn, the Board sought to centralize the system's bureaucracy and make its goal and practices consistent. Two of its members, Sanborn and Samuel Gridley Howe, would play pivotal roles in Sullivan's life.<sup>6</sup>

Even earlier in his career, according to John Donovan and Caren Zucker, Samuel Gridley Howe reported to the Massachusetts legislature in 1848, as an educator and advocate. While investigating conditions of the intellectually disabled statewide of these institutions he would consider the inmates as idiots. His assessment then would probably be considered a diagnosis as autism today.<sup>7</sup>

An institution, which began with such an auspicious and optimistic beginning later transformed into a house of sorrow and woe as historian Gerald Grob writes:

Conditions at the Tewksbury almshouse... deteriorated rapidly; its only redeeming virtue was that its cost per patient per year by 1861 was \$52.00, as compared with \$130.00 at the three state hospitals." In 1866 (ten years before Annie Sullivan and her brother Jimmie arrived) the state legislature and board of charities expanded the institutions' scope to include the Tewksbury Asylum for the Chronic Insane.<sup>8</sup>

Her feelings were dull to her family for abandoning them and following the same path of her father. She considered her genealogical tree of no consequence because being in the asylum for over ten years, seeing her brother passing in that place and having no relative visit her and none had ever written to inquire about either her or her brother Jimmie. In fact the relative told those who asked that the two children had passed away. Nielsen stated that those ten years in Anne's life, which were important for nurturing,

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<sup>6</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> John Donovan & Caren Zucker, *In A Different key: The Story of Autism* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2016), 9279, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 15-16.

security, and affirmation, the essential years that construct us as human beings, was a horrendous period of anguished and disjointed portions of her existence.<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion, Nielsen makes it clear that autistic individuals who lived in Anne's day would probably exist in the same asylum. According to Adam Feinstein, one of the best documented early cases of what we now recognize as autistic behavior emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in a wild boy around eleven or twelve whose name was Victor who lived in Aveyron, southern France. He was discovered naked while looking for acorns to eat. A celebrated doctor Philippe Pinel, considered by many as the father of modern psychiatry, thought Victor would be in the category of the incurable. With multi-scars upon his throat, it would appear, because he was autistic and strange in behavior someone, possibly those he lived with, tried to end his life.<sup>10</sup>

Anne in her lifetime had witnessed the complexity of life from the experiences on the farm and the meaning of family and fellowship, to the death of her mother Alice, and her little brother Jimmie. She could envision what faithfulness appears to be and also unfaithfulness. She was fully aware that we as human beings are comprised of a body and a soul. A well meaning but curious media communicator commented, "What is a soul" She responded by saying in 1891:

No one knows, 'but we know it is not the body, and it is that part of us which thinks and loves and hopes.... [and] is invisible... But if I write what my soul thinks, then it will be visible and the words will be its body.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Feinstein, *A History of Autism: Conversations with the Pioneers* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2010), 3.

<sup>11</sup> William Gibson, *The Miracle Worker* (New York, NY: Scribner Publishers (a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.) 1988), 17, Kindle.

### **Anne Sullivan's Desire for Education**

As was previously mentioned the reason for her lack of education germinated out of her diseased eyes. The school was named Perkin's Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, which was later changed to Perkins's Massachusetts School for the Blind by its director Michael Anagnos with this comment of rationality:

Massachusetts School for the Blind" reflects this philosophy... explaining the term asylums, it provided "permanent maintenance of blind person," and "render[ed] the lives of their inmates aimless and well-nigh useless, because they are removed from the necessity of doing something for themselves." Asylums caused blind people to "associate very closely with each other," resulting in a "clannish spirit, and a tendency to morbidness." All in all, "such places are, in short, museums of drones rather than hives of diligent workers, and crush the spirit while they seem to aid the body." Never would asylums result in economically self-sufficient adults.<sup>12</sup>

The stigma of the word asylum was removed.

Annie Sullivan was a charity case, with the help of Samuel Gridley Howe and the director Michael Anagnos and Franklin Sanborn working through the bureaucracy of the State Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity, she was admitted to the Perkins Massachusetts School of the Blind in October of 1880.<sup>13</sup>

Among the mentioned three individuals, Franklin Sanborn (1831-1917) stands out as a champion for Annie. David Wagner considered Sanborn, a renowned individual a transcendentalist. In the context of this age a transcendentalist is one who recognizes there is something or someone beyond the human existence that guides and directs, but also it means one who causes upheaval with the social and moral structure of society. Sanborn questioned the plight of the poor compared to what was considered in that day

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<sup>12</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 38-40.

the gilded age of the rich. The wealth of men such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and others compared to the masses. Sanborn was a proponent of the abolition of slavery in his earlier years. His colleagues included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and the Alcott family and others. He founded the American Social Science Association and National Conference of Charities and Corrections. While serving in these institutions, Sanborn and Annie were lives had crossed.<sup>14</sup> It was in the fall of 1880; Annie had been in the Massachusetts State Almshouse at Tewksbury for four years. Wagner expresses this day in the following:

Sanborn and his visiting team of “suits” came to the Almshouse at Tewksbury and what led up to fourteen year old Annie accosting the group as he is said to have done. We know they met, and we know Sanborn got her released and transferred to the Perkins Institution for the Blind (where Sanborn was also one of the “subscribers” or honorary trustees). But whether the story as told is 100 percent true we have no way of knowing. Sullivan told her biographer that her fellow paupers had informed her sometime before 1880 that as a person who was blind or could barely see, she should be at the school for the blind in Massachusetts... Perkins was world famous, and one of the few schools for the blind in the United States, and only 20 or so miles away in South Boston. She had evidently stored the information, and as we have seen, the inmates were well aware of the visiting dignitaries... and Mr. Sanborn would be in charge... because her vision was so poor, the fourteen-year-old Sullivan evidently plunged herself into the coterie of officials when they visited and exclaimed, “Mr. Sanborn, Mr. Sanborn, I want to go to School” We have no account of what was said then...”<sup>15</sup>

It is amazing how the essence of our lives, that part which becomes the turning point without any fanfare of forethought becomes the actual key which unlocks that portion of our lives which causes transformation in spite of our condition, class or status in life. Annie faced this pivotal point in her life with a declaration, “I want to go to School!” Her life up to this point had been a series of tragedies and setbacks, deformed

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<sup>14</sup> David Wagner, *Miracle Worker and The Transcendentalist, Annie Sullivan, Franklin Sanborn and the Education of Helen Keller* (New York, NY: Routledge Publishers, 2012), 135, Kindle.

<sup>15</sup> Wagner, *Miracle Worker and The Transcendentalist*, 1164, 1174.

sight, death of loved ones, family members who would no longer care for her, and a broken down institution filled with everything society could apprehend and contain. Her declaration seems to say not only do I want a way out, “I want to live! And I want to experience learning and understanding.”

Up to this point there has not been a change of character, her distrust of people because of her disappointments, her rebellion, and moody attitude is still there, her aloofness and almost self-imposed isolation will cause problems in the days ahead. But this day, she is facing the possibility of mobility to another quite different institution.

Her eye operations continued with little improvement. Then, at one of the hospitals they greatly alleviated most of the blindness. According to Wagner, Annie began using Roman type rather than large alphabetical letters so it was now easier to read like everyone else. She developed into a profoundly gifted student, and became the class valedictorian at her graduation; adjustment over the years on Annie’s part was necessary and accomplished. There were teachers she was fond of: Mary Moore and Cora Newton. They helped her to develop a love for Shakespearean plays and the Greek heroines, and she also became fond of working with the young children at Perkins.<sup>16</sup>

### **Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller**

Graduation has been accomplished, her six years with the prestigious Perkin’s School of the Blind was over. It’s time for employment, but who will hire her? In fact the hiring of women in that era was a rarity. If she has an entrepreneurial family she was fortunate. If she were married she would be fortunate enough to have support and an

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<sup>16</sup> Wagner, *Miracle Worker and The Transcendentalist*, 1297, Kindle.

honorable name, but if she was single and a woman looking for employment it was very difficult. Even the director of Perkins, Michael Anagnos, found it difficult and had shown reluctance in hiring Annie even though he had organized a new division for the children. Her career was in limbo with no possibility open.

Picking up the words of Helen Keller who was born on June 27, 1880 in a little town in Alabama called Tuscumbia, who lived nineteen months before her sight and her hearing was taken away. In her own autobiography she recalled the tireless efforts of her father Arthur H. Keller, a captain in the Confederate Army, and her stepmother Kate Adams as they contacted Dr. Alexander Graham Bell of Washington. Dr. Bell gave them information about schools and teachers of deaf or blind children. Keller was advised to write to Mr. Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institution in Boston. In Helen's own words:

A letter from Mr. Anagnos with the comforting assurance that a teacher had been found, this was in the summer of 1886. But Miss Sullivan did not arrive until the following March. Thus I came up out of Egypt and stood before Sinai and a power divine touched my spirit and gave it sight, so that I beheld many wonders. And from the sacred mountain I heard a voice, which said, "Knowledge is love and light and vision." The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me, I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March 1887, three months before I was seven years old....<sup>17</sup>

In retrospect this was a pivotal point in Helen Keller's life, but at the time Annie Sullivan was very reluctant to leave her surroundings, her friends and peer group to go into unknown surroundings in a southern town where people have a different view and mindset about blacks and their role in society as being subservient. Annie had witnessed two previous valedictorians at Perkins as black and qualified. She was a supporter of

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<sup>17</sup> Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life: 1888-1968* (Point Roberts, WA: Starbooks Classics Publishing, 2015), 268, 277, 280, Kindle.



abolition of all the vestiges of slavery, from lynching to name calling and ill treatment. Now she was embarking upon a moment in time when she would come face to face with a former captain of the confederate army. How would she handle the situation? The reason for her trip was to assist and train Helen which was of the utmost importance. Before leaving Massachusetts, Annie was given the last of eight eye operations and when she arrived at the home of Keller, they were swollen and inflamed which caused reluctance on Helen's father to hire her.

According to most biographers, Helen Keller at six years of age was the most obstinate, rebellious, disobedient child that ever lived in that town. Some said it was precipitated by the laxity of discipline on the part of the parents. In their effort to support her because of her disabilities, they allowed her to have food and sweets until it exacerbated into a monstrosity of bullying and temper tantrums.<sup>18</sup>

The key words Annie sought to instill in Helen were obedience and love. Annie surmised it was useless to teach Helen any language or anything else until she learned how to obey. In Annie's words "obedience is the gateway through which knowledge, yes, and love, too, enters the mind of a child." Obedience and love were what she had most resisted giving to her own teachers, but were what she most wanted, in fact, desperately desired from Helen. On the word "love" Chloe Silverman makes a surprising observation when she describes love as an analytic tool. She further states:

For without love, without close interpersonal relationships, human beings, and it would seem especially small human beings cannot survive...also love is relentlessly particular, specific, contingent, historically various, and

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<sup>18</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 81-82.

resistant to anyone having the last word. If you think my hands are full... you should see my Heart!”<sup>19</sup>

Legendary battles ensued over obedience. Kicking and screaming over hair combing, hand washing, good table manners, Annie had to isolate Helen from her family for a period of time. Her efforts looked rather bleak. Helen “knew twenty-five nouns and four verbs.” Annie spelled names by using her hands, constantly. However, Helen could not make the link between the fingerspelling and communication.

The great breakthrough began when Annie taught her the word “water.” She was taken to the pump house and placed her mug under the spout. While the cold water poured into the mug Sullivan spelled w-a-t-e-r into Helen’s free hand. It worked and Helen spelled water several times. She touched objects and the teacher hand spelled the object, thus began the road, which led to success for Helen Keller. For the first time, Annie Sullivan perceived that everything was coming together in assuredness about the training and education of Helen. She said on one occasion,

I had no idea a short time ago how to go to work; I was feeling about in the dark; but somehow I know now, and I know that I know...[that] when difficulties arise... I know how to meet them... It is wonderful.”<sup>20</sup>

Helen later wrote: “At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities. It was my teacher who unfolded and developed them. When she came, everything about me breathed of love and joy and was full of meaning. Miss Sullivan had taught me to find beauty in the fragrant woods, in every blade of grass, and in the curves and dimples of my baby sister’s hand. She linked my earliest thoughts with nature, and made me feel that “birds and flowers and I were happy peers.”<sup>21</sup>

In her collections of essays Helen speaks of the seeing hand:

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<sup>19</sup> Chloe Silverman, *Understanding Autism: Parents, Doctors, and the History of a Disorder* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-2, Kindle.

<sup>20</sup> Nielsen *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 88, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Keller, *John Macy, Anne Sullivan: The Story of my Life ( With Her Letters (1887-1901) and Supplementary account of her Education* (Digireads.com, Publishing, 2009).

My hand is to me what your hearing and sight together are to you. In large measure we travel the same highways, read the same books speak the same language, yet our experiences are different. All my comings and goings turn on the hand as a pivot. It is the hand that binds me to the world of man and woman... I have just touched by dog. He was rolling on the grass, with pleasure in every muscle and limb. I wanted to catch a picture of him in my fingers and I touched him as lightly as I would cobwebs... If he could speak, I believe he would say with me the paradise is attained by touch; for in touch is all love and intelligence.<sup>22</sup>

“Last night when I got in bed,” she wrote gratefully, “she [Helen] stole into my arms of her own accord and kissed me for the first time, and I thought my heart would burst, so full was it of joy.”<sup>23</sup>

It is important to share the experiences of Helen and Anne, but equally important is sharing others experiences and encounter with the profoundly disabled and autistic.

Amos Yong, in his book, *The Bible, Disability, and The Church: A New Vision of The People of God*, there is a section Entitled: “Hospitality for and of People with Profound Disabilities.” His definition of people in the category are those that have what is considered, severe levels of physical and intellectual limitation which effects their ability to socialize in an acceptable manner. This result in what Yong calls exclusion and marginalization.<sup>24</sup>

In Yong’s realization if it is not the love of committed family members or caretakers, the profoundly disabled would probably become institutionalized and in many cases abandoned. He further states that the church community has been at a loss as to how to minister to such people so they turn to the caregivers and try in a compassionate

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<sup>22</sup> Helen Keller, *The World I Live In & Optimism: A Collection of Essays* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009), 46,54.

<sup>23</sup> Nielsen, *Beyond the Miracle Worker*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability and The Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 1442, Kindle.

and sensitive way to minister, yet the disabled are noticeably absent in our worship and fellowship gatherings.<sup>25</sup>

Yong share a faith based model of ministry that touches the core of ministry to the profound disabled called L'Arche, which is French for ark, an international network of over 130 residential communities in over their countries devoted to caring for people with severe development disabilities and in many cases, profound disabilities.<sup>26</sup> Yong says:

At L'Arche, such individuals are called “core members,” who are assisted by caregivers. This reflects the “people first”... but beyond this parallel, L'Arche's philosophy is deeply Christian at its core, founded as it was in 1964 by two Roman Catholics, one layman and the other a priest and is driven by a vision of the full and ineradicable humanity of each person created in the image of God, regardless of that individual's capacities or abilities. Hence the role of core members and caregivers are distinct, but both are equally valued at L'Arche... L'Arche is successful because it has been able to facilitate genuinely reciprocal relationships between core members and caregivers. Each receives from and gives to the other, albeit in different respects.<sup>27</sup>

It is only when a church community develops genuine friendship with those that are profoundly disabled and are aware that our creator made them in His image and after His likeness, and because of and not in spite of, He loves them as much as He loves us. This gives us the capacity to love the profoundly disabled in a way, which produces fruits of ministry (love, peace, gentleness, patience, endurance, and strength).

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<sup>25</sup> Yong, *The Bible, Disability and The Church*, 1446.

<sup>26</sup> Yong, *The Bible, Disability and The Church*, 1446, 1451.

<sup>27</sup> Yong, *The Bible, Disability and The Church*. 1456.

Today, autism has moved from a menace to society to a genuine care and concern because of its far-reaching spectrum. John Donovan and Caren Zucker in their book, *In a Different Key*, says:

It is difficult to pinpoint the number of Americans vulnerable to such a fate, in part because statistics derived from the spectrum concept often lump people with reasonably well-developed life skills together with those who are not close to independence. Obviously, they will not all need help. But tens of thousands, at least, will lead wilting lives without it. A 2013 study found that approximately 50,000 adolescents with autism were turning eighteen that year. This suggests that we might see half a million people joining the adult autistic population by 2023. Of those who had already reached young adulthood, more than half had never held a job for pay, and on 12 percent of the more severely impaired had ever been employed in any capacity. Eight out of ten in this group were still living at home, with aging parent.<sup>28</sup>

There are organizations, which help with autism, (L'Arche's, Autism Speaks, Joni and Friends and others), there are individuals forming ministries and companies to assist in this great challenge. In late 2015, a New York mother named Ilene Lainer, cofounder with Laura Slatkin of the country's first public charted school for children with autism, as well as an autism services agency called New York Collaborates for Autism, launched a pilot housing program intended as a better alternative to the group-home model. In 2013, Connie and Harvey Lapin who in their late seventies were still autism activist, pushed through the California legislature a mandate blocking the state from imposing one-size-fits-all housing solutions, they created a self-determination program allowing individual and family choice from solo living to group living arrangements. In 2014, the College of William & Mary introduced a course on Neurodiversity, taught in part by John Elder Robinson, a man whose own diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome (autism) as an adult

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<sup>28</sup> John, Donovan and Caren Zucker, *In a Different Key* (New York, NY: Crown Publication, 2016), 9226.

changed his life for the better. He better addressed and cause acceptance of people on this spectrum because of less generalization but more of diversity among the autistic.<sup>29</sup>

Another area, which concerns my thoughts is how the church community would react to Helen's newfound miracle of communication; were they conciliatory and happy? In her writings: *The Story of My life*, Helen Keller indicated how isolated her town (Tuscumbia, Alabama) was from any school for the blind or deaf. She said even her friends and relatives sometimes doubted whether she could be taught, which seem to be the sentiment of that community.<sup>30</sup> In fact, it appears because of Helen's traveling and duties of school and appearance, her church community became transitory and sparse. Her one friend, Dr. Phillip Brooks, a great man of renown even to this day, an Episcopal clergyman of Boston's Trinity Church seems to be the one who led Helen to Christ and gives her spiritual guidance through the years.<sup>31</sup>

Janice Larsen, in her book "*Perseverance: The Story of Anne Sullivan Macy (Helen Keller's Teacher)*", display a wonderful entry of an older Annie Sullivan dated January 17, 1935:

I am an old woman now, and my days on this earth are numbered. My soul anxiously awaits the moment it is freed from the constraints of this old temple and returns to God, the One. However, before I leave, there is a story I must tell. It has been thirty years since Helen Keller wrote the story of her life, and she has pestered me for years to write my story. Even she, my companion for over half a century, does not know many of the events of my youth. I have refused to tell my story before, going so far as to burn all of my diaries. I was ashamed and embarrassed and didn't want anyone to know about my childhood. I was

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<sup>29</sup> Donovan and Zucker, *In a Different Key*, 9236, 9245, 9255.

<sup>30</sup> Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (Baltimore, MD: Starbooks Classics Publishing, 2005), 243, 251, Kindle.

<sup>31</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. *John Macy, Anne Sullivan: The Story of my Life (With Her Letters (1887-1901) and Supplementary Account of Her Education* (Boston, MA, 2014), 1887, Kindle.

convinced that my work would not be recognized or taken seriously if my past was known. Now, my frailness and blindness have dictated that I remain homebound, giving me a lot of time to look back over my life. And I realize that my story indeed must be told. *The experiences I had throughout my childhood were necessary to prepare me for what I was put on this earth to do.* All of the people who reached out to me, even if just in passing, influenced the direction of my life. My experience gave me the perseverance, knowledge, love, and understanding required to make the world accessible to an angry, uncontrollable blind and deaf child named Helen Keller. After coming out of complete darkness, she became an inspiration to people all over the world. As for me, I was able to experience the fun and wonder of my missed childhood through Helen: I saw the world and fulfilled my own passion for learning.<sup>32</sup>

And so in our service of others the fulfillment becomes two-fold. It completes and makes sense of our own biographies and it will open up a new world and a passion for the process of learning.

Anne Sullivan Macy died at seven-thirty in the morning on October 20, 1936, with Helen Keller by her side holding her hand. She was seventy years old. Helen Keller was fifty-six. They had been together for fifty years. Anne's ashes were placed in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

### Summary

There are also striking and surprising parallels in the lives and experiences of Anne and Helen which in short becomes an epiphany, in my understanding, of all forms of disabilities and autism. I could see through this analysis a pattern when such a little illumination exposes the developmental training of each. Annie Sullivan's teaching career was short lived after educating Helen. There is a connection between Annie's autobiographical journey and the journey of this little girl. Helen was the same age as Annie's brother Jimmie who died in the Massachusetts State Almshouse at Tewksbury,

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<sup>32</sup> Janice Larsen, *Perseverance: the Story of Anne Sullivan Macy (Helen Keller's Teacher)* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2008), 101, Kindle.

when she began working with her. Annie described her transformation as a great thing to feel of some use in the world.

There seem to appear in her teaching style a kind of educational alteration and adjustment based upon the pupil understands and will. The visual and hearing technique would not have helped Helen in putting together the puzzle of learning. Instead her hands became her eye and her sense of touch became her ears. There was a set of rules and system Annie used, to communicate with Helen who had to do with the vibration of the larynx or vocal cords, the touching of the nasal passage for vowels and the use of fingers for words. Therefore, depending upon the autistic child's weaknesses and strengths, we should use them as the focal point rather than a standard set curriculum. It is important to analyze the student in order to diagnose the most effective way to assist educationally.

Helen made a metaphoric statement, which brought my mind back to the biblical foundational paper scripture when she made reference to her experience with Annie. It reminded her of a journey out of Egypt to the mountainous range of Mt Sinai. And it was there (she says) the place where she was given the gift of communication and understanding. How timely and ironic is that connection? Little pieces of life, which seem not to matter at all, become the thread, which brings about cohesion and connection.

The pain and the questions in the mind of a ten-year-old Annie, the sorrow and the sadness, the experiences she faced in the asylum for not any reason of her own other than being poor and financially unable to take care of herself, her experiences within that horrendous place to put little children, her anguish in seeing her little brother die, the death of her mother and the abandonment of her father. The experiences and challenges she faced in the process of learning at Perkin's School of the Blind. The debilitating



condition of her eyes, including all those operations, all these summed up, led to the ultimate experience of teaching and training with the young girl Helen. Annie faced each challenge and overcame them in her life. It is later in her life there was a role reversal. It started out Annie was taking care of Helen, but later Helen took care of Annie, at least financially.

I also see a connection for the church community, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:20-25). Annie and Helen would be considered the feeble part of the body, unwanted, and unloved. It pleased the Lord to place them within the body and with a sovereign command for us to support them with love, and to cherish each part of the body that there may not be divisions among us but that God may be glorified.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The previous foundational papers concluded with two interesting thoughts. First, “Is there a possibility to attain unity in diversity”? Secondly, “Where does the providence of God fit in this theological equation”? In a society that makes, what appears to be god like orations toward perfection, physical beauty, and intelligence, is there room for the physically and mentally challenged? Where in this scenario? Does the element of evil emerge into a prominent menacing idea? How can we explain the effects of suffering in this world, and the disfigurations of many innocent individuals in a cosmos under the guiding and loving hand of a sovereign God?

There appears to emerge two major schools of thought, which have filtered down through the centuries. Both sides have valid arguments, which would lead to a plausible conclusion on their part. They both begin with the same presupposition but with different angles. One side gives God a reasonable amount of influence in the world today and touts God as only dealing in generalities and not in the specifics of life, or not in the details of everyday living and existence of humanity. This school of thought include traditional orthodoxy on one end of the theological spectrum to those who believe God had a hand in the inner workings of everything, but has long relinquished his power and authority to humanity almost a form of what is considered Natural Theology. There are those in this

same group who believe God is just an Idea that has traveled through centuries but with no effect whatsoever on the outcome of the cosmos. Their rationale, which permeates in their writing, is, “If God is in control,” then why? This is a valid conclusion for those with a Theistic, Deistic, and hands-off kind of God. However, surely there must be more of a logical and spiritual explanation to this argument.

In this paper the use of sovereignty and divine providence becomes almost interchangeable in the expressed way it is presented. There is variation in the author’s usage as they develop their arguments. In general sovereignty implies complete authority and control of the cosmos (creation and humanity), and divine providence indicates also authority and power but with the intent of working things out according to His will for the good of humanity. On the other hand, unorthodox traditional theological thought is the assumption that God is in some way limited in His attributes or his ability to act in the affairs of mankind.

It is important to examine the writings of these theologians and their positions. On the other hand, recent years have brought to the forefront what appear to be theologians who address a theology called “Openness theology which in some circles represents the nadir of the long slide from orthodoxy.”<sup>1</sup> Examination of these various positions is critical in our quest for answers in the area of those that are considered “differently abled” (they are abled but from a different norm). As one professor pointed out in the book *The Benefits of Providence: a New look at Divine Sovereignty*, by James Spiegel, “Christians, theologians and philosophers are called to inquire, if at times tentatively, into even the most hallowed domains of human knowledge. We are called not simply to rest

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<sup>1</sup> James Spiegel, *The Benefits Of Providence: A New Look At Divine Sovereignty* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 9, 61, 64.

in the dogmas of the past—however profound and well established—but to explore new inroads to orthodoxy, to articulate afresh the verities of the faith, and re-inspire the people of God with the core teachings of our tradition.<sup>2</sup> We will examine the theological expressions of classical theologians such as Theodoret of Cyrus, the works of St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, the Reformation Period, which includes Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Open Theology under such notable theologians as Greg Boyd and others. Included also in this modernist discussion would be the thoughts of Alfred North Whitehead and his version of what has become Process Theology, the idea as Spiegel succinctly points out, the idea that God changes in diverse ways as a result of his relation to the world is the main distinctive process theology and the many variation of Liberation Theology.<sup>3</sup> What appears to be shared in all the discussions with most of the modernists who recognizes God's existence and appearance is that they cannot come to grips with an all-aware all-powerful God who is in control and the over-lapping problem with human free-choice. Either there is free choice or there is not free choice. Would this free choice inhibit God's ability to be God in some way? Examining these issues will prove to be most interesting.

### **The Providence of God from Traditional Orthodoxy**

In his writings, Dr. Andrew Sung Parks, speaks about the theology of seeing. In this offering there is a unique but placid illustration of the God mindset, which saturates Parks thoughts of creation. Dr. Parks says after the third day God said that everything

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<sup>2</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits Of Providence*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits Of Providence*, 35.

was good, (Gn 1:10 KJV). The creation was incomplete yet God saw the beauty in what was an incomplete creation. How is it possible to see completeness in an incomplete creation? Dr. Parks believes that this is only possible through what he describes as the theology of seeing.<sup>4</sup> He gives a unique perspective, which seems to be a theme of the Orthodox theologians through the centuries. Dr. Parks further states:

A theology of seeing stresses how we see God's revelation. Our seeing is as crucial as God's revelation. Without our seeing, God's revelation is not revelation to us. Our understanding of faith, affection, and hope derives from our perception of God's revelation. Inseparable from God's revelation, seeing is the key to bringing salvation and liberation to creation.<sup>5</sup>

Like Dr. Parks there are elements of faith that these Orthodox theologians must have seen, for it is vividly expressed in their writing and their expressed beliefs. Without the theology of seeing, our presuppositional concept will either become closer to understanding or driven farther from what is actually considered sovereignty (complete authority and control of the cosmos).

### **Theodore of Cyrus on Divine Providence**

To begin, it is very important to understand the great debates, which took place after the great persecutions of the church, which was halted by Constantine, (AD 312) with the edict of Milan. A new era has begun for the church, an era of debate over the deity of Christ, (Council of Nicaea, AD 325), over the Trinitarian concept (Council of Constantinople, AD 381), and debating the two natures of Christ, (Council of Ephesus,

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew S. Parks. *Racial Conflict and Healing: An Asian-American Theological Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 129.

<sup>5</sup> Parks, *Racial Conflict and Healing*, 130.

AD 431).<sup>6</sup> It is in this atmosphere of debate that Theodoret of Cyrus writes his book “*De providential, Divine Providence*” presents his stance on traditional orthodoxy. This theologian was born in AD 386 and was trained by such notables as Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. John Chrysostom. His writing yields his understanding of the Greek Philosophers of Neoplatonism. Cyrus was also a stronghold of divisiveness of Arians, Eunomians, Marcionites and Encratites who had developed their own ideas about the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and the role of the Holy Spirit. It was in this atmosphere that Theodoret was condemned in AD 449, appealed to Pope Leo I, and was reinstalled with episcopal dignity. He was recognized as “an orthodox teacher and ruled the Church at Cyrus for years and died about AD 460.”<sup>7</sup>

Theodoret’s writings are didactic in nature but draw a logical conclusion in the way they are stated. They are divided into ten (10) discourses, which explain the providential hand of God in ten different areas of human affairs. He begins by stating that his position, which is common with Greek fathers, is providence is the divine action, which sustains everything in existence. The divine government of the world is the execution of eternal divine world-plan in time.<sup>8</sup> He begins to build a strong case for providence through the teleological argument from the standpoint that providence is the production of a God that controls because He is the architect of order and design. He argues from the standpoint of the physiological, and the biological makeup of the human body, the dominant human control over plants and animals, a presentation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Rogers, Ross Mackenzie, Louis Weeks, *Case Studies in Christ and Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 19-36.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Halton, *Theodoret of Cyrus: On Divine Providence* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Halton, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 4, 5.

providence found in scripture (a homily of characters, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Laban, Joseph and others) and how their lives are guided by providence. He was most impressive at the end when he speaks of providence as it relates to Christology which gives rise to not general providence from a God who is generally in charge, but a specific detailed God, who measure and knows every detail to the cosmos and humankind.

One element expressed but not highly thought of in the philosophy community is the element of human limitation and understanding. Theodoret points to an all-wise God who is being understood through limited minds, minds that believe highly in their unlimited capabilities.

Theodoret gives a final summary, which crystalizes his position on providence:

Knowing this, and aware of the all-pervading providence of God, and seeing His unlimited love for men and His immeasurable mercy, stop raving against the creator, learn to praise His goodness, repay His great blessing with words of gratitude...reverence what can be seen of the divine plan and do not trouble yourself about what is hidden. Await a full knowledge of these things in the life to come. When we are divested of the passions we will attain to perfect knowledge. Do not imitate Adam who dared to pick forbidden fruit. Do not say; what is this, or what is that? For all things were made to supply a need.<sup>9</sup>

The Orthodox position taken by Theodoret has weight and it is argued with logic and scriptural proof-text, yet it has failed to address in a comprehensive way, the problem with the relationship of free choice and the providence of God, where does evil fit into this equation, the element of suffering in humanity, and the problem of sin.

Thomas long in his writing: *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith*, uses the theological term theodicy to mean the justification of God. How can we justify God in a world where terrible catastrophes happen and where people suffer out of all proportion to any sense of deserving, God, it was felt, had some explaining to do. The

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<sup>9</sup> Halton, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 154.

ways of God needed to be justified. God needed a good defense.<sup>10</sup> According to Long in his conclusion there is a summoning of loving and faithful warriors to join in collective action with God, to be present in this world of pain and show the victorious love of God, acting as buffers in this world of evil suffering and loss of faith.<sup>11</sup>

### **St Augustine's Classical View of Providence**

In his writing, *The Benefits of Providence*, James Spiegel explains the theological thought of this classical theologian St Augustine by saying for the next 1,500 years the orthodoxy position has been clearly and succinctly articulated by the writings of St Augustine of Hippo.<sup>12</sup> Further, Spiegel continues:

According to Augustine, God possesses infallible knowledge of all events throughout the course of history. God has complete foreknowledge, but He does not apprehend the future as we do, “for He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness; so that...those things which emerge in time... are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence. God, then, is not essentially a temporal being. He enters into time, but He is not limited by it. So there is no increase in His knowledge, as “all that was to be in time, what and when we were to ask of Him, to whose asking and to what requests He should harken or not harken, we known to Him beforehand without any beginning”<sup>13</sup>

In his most notable writing, *The City of God*, St. Augustine ` contributes to the discussion of the position of man as it relates to why does evil exist, the question of

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas G. Long, *What Shall we Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2011), 33.

<sup>11</sup> Long, *What Shall We Say?* 1880, 1886.

<sup>12</sup> James Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 21-22.



freewill suffering and God's sovereignty. Spiegel is of the opinion that Augustine's concept of the above-mentioned scenario was covered under his philosophy entitled *compatibilism*, the view that determinism and human freedom (and therefore moral responsibility) are logically compatible.<sup>14</sup>

It makes sense that these elements are presented as unification between human and divine, but in other theological circles there is contradiction with the introduction of pain, sorrow, bereavement, physical and mental challenges and deformity. The writing of St Augustine in *City of God* paints a picture of Rome out of control of its own doing and constantly shifting the blame to others, namely, the Christians. In his writings there are two cities, one, which is corrupt by its own hand, and the other, which is God's Kingdom. He uses in this fifth century AD what is considered Theological Apologetics, providing reasonable defense for the cause of Christ and the Christians he even explains compassion extended to the uncompassionate, under the title, "Of the Advantages and Disadvantages which often Indiscriminately Accrue to Good and Wicked Men:"

Will someone say, "Why, then was this divine compassion extended even to the ungodly and ungrateful? Why, but because it was the mercy of Him who daily maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For though some of these men, taking thought of this repent of their wickedness and reform, some, as the apostle says, "despising the riches of His goodness and long suffering, after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds"<sup>15</sup>

There is a strong bent in his writing toward a providential understand and positioning of the providence of God as he performs his task of rendering righteousness,

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<sup>14</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Marcus Dods, *The City of God* (Littleton, CO: Coterie Classic, 2016), 339, 349, editionedition.

and justice to a city of wickedness and seemingly no regard for the things of God. Augustine uses the word providence to describe a reversal of good things from the wicked to the just in the second city, the Kingdom of God:

And so, too, does the mercy of God embrace the good that I may cherish them, as severity of God arrests the wicked to punish them. To the divine providence it has seemed good to prepare in the world to come for the righteous good things, which the unrighteous shall not enjoy; and for the wicked evil things, by which the good shall not be tormented. But as for the good things of this life, and its ills, God has willed that these should be common to both; that we might not too eagerly covet the things which wicked men are seemed equally to enjoy, nor shrink with an unseemly fear from the ills which even good men often suffer... Yet often, even in the present distribution of temporal things, does God plainly evince His own interference...?"<sup>16</sup>

The thought of God's over-ruling hand in the affairs of mankind is clearly seen in Augustine's writings. According to him, God prevails according to his might and power even in the minute details of human existence. He explains the element of evil as he sees the dismantling of cities by the Roman government, the ravishing of women and the destruction and the unrighteous redistribution of homes and property to others as the fruits of war. Yet, it is evident that there is a God who knows cares and will act at the proper time to root up unrighteousness and justify those who have been abused and maligned.

### **St Thomas Aquinas**

Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic priest who lived in Roccasecca, Italy from AD 1225-1274 was a theologian influenced by Scholasticism (teaching effected by tradition and dogma of the medieval period, and a heavy influence of Aristotelian logic) and a disciple of St Augustine. In his writing, *Summa Theologica*, he answers the question about the

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<sup>16</sup> Dods, *The City of God*, 358.

providence of God. He uses oppositional question and he then answers them. Questions of this nature: Whether providence is suitably assigned to God? Whether everything comes under divine providence? Whether divine providence is immediately concerned with all things? Aquinas addresses each opposition respectively by saying: The good that is in created things has been created by God, and that good, not only to their substance, but also as regards to their order. He further adds:

Providence is that divine type itself, seated in the Supreme Ruler: which disposeth All things: which disposition may refer either to the type of the order of things towards an end, or to the type of the order of parts in the whole... “Certain person totally denied the existence of providence, as Democritus and Epicureans, maintaining that the world was made by chance...” We must say, however that all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves.”<sup>17</sup>

Aquinas moves away from the crowd, which espouse happenstance as a part of their philosophy, this conundrum can create uncertainty about life and the creation of the universe. Aquinas is sure that the God he is familiar with, even though evil is present in our world, the controlling factor is still divine providence. He is also very specific about what kind of providence, not a general providence, which intervenes in major situations and circumstance, but specific providence, which is concerned even with seemingly mundane, everyday affairs in the life of humanity. This is very encouraging to those who are of the community in the shadows, the physically and mentally challenged. It gives hope and in many cases not total understanding but at least is included within the discussion of those who suffer.

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Providence, (Claremont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), Amazon digital.

### Martin Luther

The dominance of the theological world continued through the medieval period until October 31, 1517. A priest in Germany wrote a disputation to the Pope on the door of the church in Wittenberg. Thus, began the Protestant Reformation. His main dispute against the Catholic had to do with indulgence, a practice whereby the Pope and the leadership of the church have the power and the efficacy to absolve sin in the life of its constituency. Luther's fifth thesis says, "The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those, which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons."<sup>18</sup>

In regards to Martin Luther's position on divine providence, it is saturated in his writings because his efficacy is no longer in the Pope and the Catholic Church but with Christ. His allegiance is with the atoning work of Christ; therefore it is not a stretch of the imagination to say that Martin Luther believed in divine providence from the hand of a gracious and living God who showed His children ultimate suffering and deformity from the cross. James Spiegel reference Luther as being criticized about his stand on the problem of evil with these pointed questions: "If God controls human wills, then how can we be blamed for our wrong choices? And doesn't God's sovereignty over evil threaten His own goodness?"<sup>19</sup> Luther says according to Spiegel:

He prefers simply to affirm as a biblical fact both divine sovereignty and divine goodness in the face of human evil, rather than to explain how they are compatible. "When God works in and by evil man, evil deeds result. Yet God cannot do evil Himself, for He is good. He uses evil instruments... The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Ninety-five Thesis and Selected Sermons* (Jersey City, NJ: Start Publishing LLC, 2012), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 24.

instruments which God does not allow lying idle...” So God’s actions are not to be measured or evaluated by us. On the contrary, His will “is itself the measure of all things.” God’s will is perfect; so “what takes place must be right, because He so wills it.”<sup>20</sup>

His writings: “The Bondage of the Will” Luther further states:

For if we believe it to be true, that God fore-knows and fore-ordains all things; that he can be neither deceived nor hindered in His Prescience and Predestination; and that nothing can take place but according to His will, (which reason herself is compelled to confess;) then even according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no “Free will” in man, in angel, or in any creature!... If we believe that the original sin has so destroyed us, that even in the godly who are led by the Spirit, it causes the utmost molestation by striving against that which is good; it is manifest, that there can be nothing left in a man devoid of the Spirit which can turn itself towards good, but which must turn toward evil!<sup>21</sup>

A biblical example would be seen in the life of Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery. The Midianite caravan brought him to Egypt. In spite of the arduous journey and even being placed in prison, God allowed Joseph to become second-in-command under Pharaoh. Under the watchful eye of God, Joseph not only saved his family from famine but also saved the entire known world from starvation and death. Seeing the hand of God in his life, there was no animosity towards his brothers because their evil was overcome and used as an instrument for good:

And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them (Gn 50:18-21 KJV).

It shows through this passage of scripture a watchful, concerned, and caring God, who has a will and will act with purpose. It shows a God who will reveal His purpose to whom He

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<sup>20</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Chicago, IL: Acheron press, 2008), 165.

will in a tangible and complete way, which produce continuity and understanding of purpose and meaning of life.

### **John Calvin**

Another reformer who with detailed theological gifts, articulated his thoughts of providence, condensed it into what is considered by other theologians the *opus magnum* of Christian theology. One such theologian gives a brief summary of Calvin's approach to scripture:

One feature of Calvin's exegetical work is his concern for the analogy of Scripture. He is always careful to take account of the unity and harmony of Scripture teaching. His expositions are not therefore afflicted with the vice of expounding particular passages without respect to the teaching of Scripture elsewhere and without respect to the system of truth set forth in the Word of God.<sup>22</sup>

It is with his position on election, which is a little extreme; however there is much strength in his providential thoughts, which has garnered my attention. He speaks of the providence of God by presenting the knowledge of God in creation. The uniqueness of His creative power manifested in the very essence of the heavenly universe:

To investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies, to determine their positions, measure their distances and ascertain their properties, demands skill, and a more careful examination; and where these are so employed, as the Providence of God is thereby more full unfolded, so it is reasonable to suppose that the mind takes a loftier flight, and obtains brighter views of his glory.<sup>23</sup>

Even in his commentary on providence there is an assurance of an abiding faith, which permeates his writings:

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<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Orlando, FL: Signalman Publishing, 2009), 110, Kindle .

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1014, 1025.

As I have said before, the Lord has his own hidden counsel by which he disposes of everything in the world, but since it is incomprehensible to us, let us have sense enough to keep away from undue curiosity in prying into it.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin poses many elements of providence worth noting. First, he explains providence in a godly manner and places God in His rightful place of authority. He does not leave the precious spiritual things to chance for fortune, yet there is a place in his theology for human response to providence, free will, which does not (in his mind) overlap the sovereignty of God. He places sin in its original position, at the feet of Adam; then he examines evil and places it under the guiding and watchful hand of a God who is in control of all things, even the things that are tasteless and leave us questioning his rationale for our suffering and pain.

### **The Modern Theologians**

We move from the position of orthodoxy to what I consider the abstract approach to theology. This diverse but interesting approach to the knowledge of God, presents valid points of discussion. Also, in the material used to compile this presentation, there is an underlying theme, which seems to permeate through the theologians' writings: There is a clear danger of having a flawed God who will not act because he has given his power over to humanity. It is a solemn and disturbing image to picture the God of the universe seemingly sitting in a room in Las Vegas rolling a pair of dice, as some theological perspectives would categorize His providence, to map out His plans for the world and for people in general. The fatalistic modernistic worldview of God is the overriding element that captivates open-theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 361.

## Process Theology

Alfred N. Whitehead's work, *Process and Reality*, is considered to be a major philosophical work of the modern world and an extensive body of secondary literature has developed around it.<sup>25</sup>

James S. Spiegel emphasizes the premise of Whitehead's writings that as our world is in a process of constant change, so is the Creator changing in diverse ways. To quote Spiegel:

The founder of this movement, philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, distinguished between two aspects of a dipolar divine nature—a primordial nature and a consequent nature. According to Whitehead, the primordial nature of God is “free, complete...eternal, actual deficient, and unconscious,” whereas the consequent side of God's nature “is determined, incomplete, everlasting, fully actual, and conscious.” Although God is distinct from the world, He does not really transcend the world. He is with and in the world, changing and growing through His interaction with the world. Similarly, the world itself is “impotent to achieve actuality apart from the complete idea harmony, which is God. So both God and the world are actualized through each other's influence.”<sup>26</sup>

Are there any biblical references to God as infinite, everlasting and immutable? Spiegel gives the thought of Charles Hartsthorne who brings to the forefront this theology by adding:

But how can God be perfect and yet change... changing God in such a way as to address this common objection to process theology? Hartsthorne redefines divine perfection to men that do is better than any individual other than himself. He says, “God is perfect in love, but never-completed, every growing, (Partly through our efforts) in joy, the richness of his life, and this without end through all the infinite future.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1978).

<sup>26</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 35-36.



This thought seems to be problematic in the sense that God can be both immutable and placed in a human timetable of change. He can be both distinct from the world, and transcends the world? How can God actually be perfect in love yet growing in love? This theological anthropocentric hybrid is lacking in continuity and succinctness, either God is infinite or He is not, either God is everlasting or He is not, either God is immutable or He is not, he cannot be either or, because of what is actual observed in the universe, a universe with distinction and brilliance, a universe with seasons and finality, a universe with accuracy and timing. If God is accurate in the universe, there is much to say about His providence in the lives of human beings. There is a tendency to lower the divine to the level of humanity, which is lacking in sound convincing believability.

### **Liberation Theology**

The central theme of liberation, which appeared in the 1970s and led into the 80s seems to turn away from the Orthodox traditional theology, in fact it appears to deny the tenets of its foundational workings and has replaced it with a theology which only relates to liberation of the oppressed. This is a noble idea, but upon careful examination of orthodoxy the element of liberation is actually present and is a holistic one (Jn 8:36; Jn 10:10; Lk 4:18).

*Gustavo Gutiérrez*

The appeal of liberation theology in the Latin American context was embraced instead of traditional Christian theology. Some saw the traditional as a part of capitalism and aided in oppressing the people, therefore it is to be overthrown with the other

elements of the West. There is within this liberation theology a move away from spiritual activity and a move towards what is considered the anthropological aspects of revelation.<sup>28</sup> Gutiérrez explains the Word of God and then he characterized the God of Christian revelation is a God incarnate which is a good explanation of Christian theology. Yet he pursues the idea that thoughts about the Word of God and the incarnation of God through Christ Jesus, brings another element, that is, the revaluation of human presence and activity in the world especially in relation to other human beings. The contribution of humanity in this liberation theology is the central focus. Yes, Christianity in some cases must be militant and active, but the activity must be questioned, analyzed, and evaluated to make sure it does not become a self-satisfying aspiration, but a worthy endeavor which effects our social strata, but one that produces Christological fruit for the Kingdom.

Quoting Spiegel's assessment of Latin theological thought:

Unlike most of his fellow liberationist, Gutiérrez strove to make a biblical case for his theology, but his rejection of the traditional approach to divine providence, in favor of an anthropocentric view of history, is nonetheless evident. Gutiérrez endorses "a historical vision in which mankind assumes control of its own destiny." In this perspective, the unfolding of all of man's dimensions is demanded—a man who makes himself throughout his life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new man and a qualitatively different society.<sup>29</sup>

There will be struggles within our society that are so heinous that it causes questions within the traditional theological thoughts, but it is a major step to radically change our principles from Christos-centered to Anthropos-centered. This leaves out the most important part of the equation, which is the placement of divine providence in our

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<sup>28</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 37.

approach to suffering, pain, sorrow and the understanding of sin and evil within this context.

### *James Cone*

Cone's liberation theology is similar to the Latin version because they both speak of the oppressed and giving relief to the suffering but Cone speaks of the oppression of the Afro-American under the bondage of slavery. Cone seems to express that we must interpret our Christian theological position in light of our Black experience, because the historical, traditional markers have pointed to the same, in light of their experiences:

We must not only ask about the social context of the tradition that made it possible for the Church to treat Christ's relations to the slave as peripheral to its proclamation of the gospel, but we also must press the question to its logical conclusion: In the absence of the theme of freedom or liberation of the slave, did the Church lose the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ?<sup>30</sup>

Spiegel understands of Cone's position on providence is not conclusive based upon a few quotes. He seems to lean more toward God and human suffering as (using a metaphorical expression) oil and water, with the idea that there is no homogenization of the two. He also adds in explaining Cone's position on providence:

Omnipotence does not refer to God's absolute power to accomplish what He wants. Instead Cone prefers to see God's power as concerned solely with liberation of the oppressed.<sup>31</sup>

After analyzing the works of Cone, it does have liberating overtones (which is not bad in itself), and appears he has been so deeply affected by the racial overtones of his childhood that it has permeated into his theological foundation until it seems to have

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<sup>30</sup> James Cone, *The God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 104, Kindle .

<sup>31</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 38.

made its way into the salvific spectrum. I remember the separate toilets, and the separate water fountains. I can still see the glare of others as we entered into unknown restricted locations just to ask for information. Or the monitoring of our whereabouts in the stores, and the sinister grin on the faces as we passed by; but my perception of Jesus is the same when I met him years ago. He is as gracious as He is divine. The liberation process begins at examining the propitiation provided by Christ. Cone provides the proper rhetoric of the early slavery and post-slavery culture, language, and hymns, yet it is lacking in proper inclusiveness that is available through the grace of God, this in a way distances him from orthodoxy.<sup>32</sup>

### **Feminist Theology**

Proponents of this theology like Sallie McFague, Anne Carr, and Elizabeth Johnson have a problem with the perception of God and the terminology of Him as patriarchal based upon the biblical image depicted as King and being sovereign. So instead of these terms why not include God as mother, lover, healer, and friend?

Their liberation is the result of seeing God as a compassionate lover who responds to pain as a personal loss for Him and He would undergo any sacrifice to relieve the pain, not in a salvific way but in the way humans would respond to pain.<sup>33</sup> They reject the idea of traditional theology as it relates to providence and replaces it with an idea of the social and moral dimensions of God's relationship to the world.<sup>34</sup>

Like the other liberation theology, there is an element worth discussing when one

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<sup>32</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 38-40.

<sup>33</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 40.

interjects a problem in society where one group is being abused by another group; this is totally wrong and out of step with the biblical concept of love and forgiveness. It is when these groups become efficacious in their efforts to promote themselves and their findings that it becomes more than a theology but almost godlike, in their approach to their theology. There is a better way than what I consider Issue Theology.

### **Openness Theology**

This theology is not a traditional theology yet it has evangelical tendencies. A term coined by James Spiegel, which has all the markings of modernism in its philosophy. Among those who ascribe to this thinking is John Sanders, David Basinger, and a major proponent is Gregory Boyd. Their view of providence as described by Spiegel:

God is bound by time and does not entirely know the future, God's power is limited by human freedom, God, fundamentally opposes all human suffering, while God Himself suffers as His involvement with the world leads to divine surprise, disappointment, sorrow, anger, and other real passion... In openness theology divine relationality entails that God cannot be omniscient as traditionally understood. Open theists reject the notion that God has exhaustive knowledge of all events past, present, and future. Instead they affirm "God knows everything about the future which is logically possible for Him to know, and future free human actions are not knowable in advance by any being, so they cannot be included among the things that God knows."<sup>35</sup>

Gregory Boyd in his writings about the problem of evil refers to it as a problem with God's providence and thus, a problem with God's character.<sup>36</sup> The premise of the book is taken from Daniel 10, where Daniel has been fasting and praying for twenty-nine days. When the angel appears he says, he was hindered by the "King of Persia," which in

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<sup>35</sup> Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence*, 40-43.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 374, Kindle.

reality is an emissary of evil. Boyd's argument is "How can a God so powerful is hindered by one of His own creations? Is it possible that all-power does not emanate from His person?" Boyd further states:

Seriously consider the possibility of a menacing presence of an evil "Prince" over our region as a factor in whether a child is molested, a baby is born healthy or ill or a group of people accept or reject the gospel. This passage and others like it raises some questions that do not fit easily with our traditional western theology."<sup>37</sup>

Boyd again give facets of discussion about the possibility of a Warfare motif, which ranges from a worldview predicated on the assumption that divine goodness does not completely control or in any sense will evil, rather good and evil are at war with one another, and God must work with and battle against, other created beings. While none of these beings can ever match God's own power, each has some degree of genuine influence within the cosmos with a warfare worldview being inherently pluralistic.<sup>38</sup>

This view has a basic assumption, which places it in the character of all unorthodox traditional theological thought. The assumption is that God is in some way limited in His attributes. Therefore these tragic events and challenges are not under His domain or not within the realm of His ability to act. It is the results of others; human beings, demons, nature to press their will upon the cosmos. God is not simply a cosmic facsimile of the Wizard of Oz, behind the divine invisible screen projecting divine author only to find a helpless finite image of God with more frailties than humanity.

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<sup>37</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, 178.

<sup>38</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, 378.

### Summary

In consideration of all the theology over the centuries, from the writing of the apostolic fathers, St Augustine, through the Reformation period and up to this present day of Open Theology, there have been a lot of assumptions made about God. Some were interesting in thought and logic; others were a bit sketchy in structure and idea. Some theological writings appear to be what I consider reverse-anthromorphism, where human thought and concepts are actually visualized as a part of the reality of God's person. This is a dangerous way to perceive God, and even more dangerous is our distribution of this thought to laymen as if it is pure gospel. The results could be devastating upon a family with physically and mentally challenged members trying to make sense out of their loved ones' condition only to read that this situation happened by chance, or that a demon in their region placed this illness upon their child, or to perceive that God really does not care?

The only one who really knows the answers to the world's most perplexing problems is God. Not a distorted version of God, but the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible placed limitations on the protagonist that would destroy Job, secured freedom for the children of Israel because it had a salvific purpose, and will crush all chains of bondage upon all humanity because that is why He came (Lk 4). Our problem as human beings is not with seeing, for we have seen the ravaging that comes from the hand of evil and sin, we have seen racism in its ugliest forms from every facet of humanity. We have seen the spectrum of liberation, which leads to other kinds of bondage. Our problem is not with seeing. Maybe our problem is an actual Augustinian concept of belief. For belief has its birthplace in faith (Heb 11:1). It seems so antiquated to have to write down

something so obvious, but our faith is that element which can sustain us in the times of suffering and sorrow, in times of challenges there is strength when it is a hopeless and helpless situation. The doctrine of faith has many assets, which can aid in the time of need. Therefore, my conclusion is to maintain Traditional Orthodoxy in our thought, meaning, and action within our ecclesiastical communities.

The theological relevance of the subject and the project is our theological persuasion has a major bearing upon our attitudinal outlook as it relates to our belief in an all-wise and all-sovereign God who is aware of our condition and the condition of our physically and or mentally challenged loved one who wants to be inclusive in the norm of society. With this understanding or model of God, there is that awesome sense that He has the controls and faith watches as He shares as Roman 8:28 becomes a reality in our walk with God.

On the other hand, if one's theological persuasion is on the other spectrum, there is an overwhelming tendency to have a pessimistic view of our loved one's condition and our approach to an impotent God who does not act, who does not know, and who does not care. It leaves a numbing sensation in attitude and in our walk with a God who does not act. It seems to be a type of existential fatalism, which is a dangerous and uncontrollable reaction to what could be perceived as a miserable human existence with no hope and no escape.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine theories relevant to the theme “The Exclusion of the Autistic Child from the Sunday Morning Worship Services of Union Grove Baptist Church.” There are also many unfounded assumptions, biases, and generalizations which were made about this topic and which will be examined. The area of concentration will cover the spectrum of disciplines that poses models of ministry previously used by others in the area of medicine, psychology, education, and sociology. In a general sense, this paper will shed light upon all physically and mentally challenged individuals who suffer exclusion because of their unique conditions, but specifically the focus will be upon the Autistic Spectrum Syndrome Child.

A few questions about the approach of this chapter are presented here. Is there a correlation between the genetic make-up of an autistic child and a child that is considered by society a normal child? Is there a connection between the historical and the clinical approaches to Hugh Blair as described in the book *Autism in History: The Case of Hugh Blair of Borgue*? Blair was considered and classified as a fool and his right to wed was taken away by the courts, only to find he was later diagnosed as autistic by examination of the key facts, and the utilization of modern clinical methodology. Is there a correlation between the use of vaccine to counteract the big three, which are measles, mumps, and

rubella otherwise known as MMR, and the inference that this process produces autism? Is autism a biological condition, or a physiological or a psychological condition?

There are many avenues that could be examined, but because of limitation of pages and time these questions are more than enough material to examine these contemporary models and praxis. Has there been an increase in autistic characteristics in previous centuries compared to this 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is it possible that per capital population is within a certain range? Like many theories there are some that are left behind because they proved to be less than what was expected. However, these theories only eliminated erroneous methods, which ultimately led to better methods of operation. There are models in ministry that have proven to be effective in a community setting. Amos Yong's *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People* speaks of the church inclusion of people with disabilities. The work of the L'Arche community founded by Jean Vanier and supported by Henry Nouwen will also be examined and discussed.

This subject is so vast that not one ministry can even consider all of the exclusions. The exclusion is not diabolical or pre-meditated, but a unifying front with collaboration of the fellowship. This will make significant differences and it is hoped, changes, will become a reality in the life of those that are most effected by the marginalization of those who are considered "the least of these" (Mt 25:40) in the house of the Lord. This inclusion will come with the proper awareness and proper communication skills utilized to instruct with an attitude of prayerful efforts of dedication.

Will the biases cease? It is the premise of this paper to present the current theories, to show the effects of these theories and to show implementation in the

possibilities of a nuance in communication strategies which will aid in the elimination of such marginalization and exclusion of the physically and mentally challenged.

### **Theoretical Foundations in Ministry Practice**

The practicum of ministry covers a wide range of applications most of which have been useful in their particular context. Jean Vanier founded one of the most renown in the area of supporting the physically and mentally challenged. In his writing, *Becoming Human*, Vanier recalled how the ministry developed after years of teaching and mentoring in the academic and theological setting. He bought a house in Trosly Breuil, France, in 1964 and invited two men with developmental disabilities to live with him. The name that he used to describe this arrangement was called L'Arche, after Noah's Ark, so named because it became a place of refuge and support for the physically and mentally challenged. Now it has a network of more than one hundred communities in thirty countries for people with these challenges and caregivers. The goal is to achieve a sense of community and dignity not possible within an institution.<sup>1</sup>

This model presents some interesting facets to the methodology and approach to exclusion and marginalization of the physically and mentally challenged. It creates an idea of a communal setting with caretakers where people actually live, help, prepare food, and perform proper tasks of everyday living. It appears to be assisted living in a separated isolated community rather than in an individual building. We have a dichotomy of sorts; on the one hand we have the challenged individuals living, worshiping and fellowshiping with similar people and a place that has become their refuge. This is

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Anansi Press Inc. 1998, 2008), 13, Kindle .

admirable, acceptable, and gives positive spiritual reinforcement. No doubt there is a sense of peace and happiness to find their place of refuge. On the other hand it appears to create a model of inclusion but at the price of taking them away from normal society and thus becoming an exclusive society of their own. They have in a way abandoned any thought of co-existence within the framework of their individual communities; they have become a community to themselves. This is not to say that this model is not effective, because it has proven its effectiveness by its longevity and results. It has crossed the writer's mind to visit and to observe its nuances for proper noting and applications within the framework of the church community.

The assumption of this particular topic is being confirmed by the writings of Vanier. He mentioned two things, which become the hallmark for exclusion in any context. The first is fear. Vanier says:

I have been living for more than thirty years with men and women who have been excluded from society. I have seen firsthand how fear is a great and terrible motivator of human actions. Through my experience with these men and women with intellectual disabilities, I have become more aware of how fear is at the heart of prejudice and exclusion. We are frightened of those who are different, those who challenged our authority, our certitudes, and our value system.

We are all so frightened of losing what is important for us, the things that give us life, security, and status in society. We are frightened of change and, I suspect, we are even more frightened of our own hearts. Fear makes us push those with intellectual disabilities into far off, dismal institutions... Fear always seeks an object. If I feel insecure in myself, I will almost always find some scapegoat for my fear someone or something that I can turn into the object of my fear and then my anger.<sup>2</sup>

The second, the pain of exposure to such a heart rendering challenge of our humanity. Some would rather give monetarily than to deal with the implications of a struggling individual. We have the propensity to become routinely selfish in our

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<sup>2</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 72,73.

circumstances. It disturbs us when individuals enter into our exclusive space with problems, and weaknesses. It upsets us to the point when we just want to get away from the situation and leave it up to others to handle what is perceived as a problem. In his section “Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion,” Vanier emphasizes:

It’s not just a question of performing good deeds for those who are excluded but of being open and vulnerable to them in order to receive the life that they can offer; it is to become their friends. If we start to include the disadvantaged in our lives and enter into heart-felt relationships with them, they will change things in us. They will call us to be people of mutual trust, to take time to listen and be with each other... They will break down the prejudices and protective walls that gave rise to exclusion in the first place. They will then start to affect our human organizations, revealing new ways of being and walking together.<sup>3</sup>

The L’Arche assumes an element of optimism and hope for humanity and that inclusion will become the norm, rather than the exception. They have shown the pathway to inclusion and have given a unique model that should be examined by all those who promulgate a health attitude toward inclusion.

The focus perceived is one of many worthwhile models that will have a positive effect upon this paper and the way of inclusion. The heartfelt explanation of the inception of L’Arche and its impact upon our world is more than notable. It is a positive phenomenon and it does show effectiveness from an exclusion-inclusion setting. Much can be learned from a refuge community or what is considered a safe haven for the physically and mentally challenged. Can the elements of this model be utilized within the church community context? The writer believes that it is possible and it is also do-able. It will take time, prayer, and collaboration but it can be done.

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<sup>3</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 83,84.

### The Expansion of Safer Places

This is the thought of Amos Yong. In his book, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*, Yong agrees with the basic tenets of L'Arche, without a form of isolation but the beginning of inclusion in everywhere possible. For example, in short, inclusion in classrooms allow for the creation of a safer place for all students to be.<sup>4</sup>

Yong further states:

Our claim is that such “safer places” should be expanded, both in our churches in particular and in our ecclesial communities in general. Congregations and parishes can play crucial roles in this process precisely through their ministry to all people, including those with intellectual disabilities, as well as through their reception of the ministry of all people, including those with intellectual disabilities. Churches can be crucial sites for the formation of spaces of belonging, where all ages can learn to exercise the mutuality, reciprocity, and hospitality of inclusion through interaction with people with intellectually disabilities. What would happen if the public discovered that church communities were creating inclusive educational and liturgical environments because they valued the presence of children and people with intellectual disabilities? How might the mission of the church be reinvigorated precisely through having people with disabilities and their families in its midst? In what ways would the church be seen as more rather than less relevant to the world if it were to become a more hospitable community especially for people with intellectual disabilities? How might the image of the church be transformed if people with intellectual disabilities were honored and their lives celebrated at the center of the ecclesial community? Wouldn't such “weakness” manifest itself as the strength and power of the cross and as the wisdom of God?<sup>5</sup>

Yong's approach is similar to L'Arche but yet different; Yong's approach is closer to this writer through process about inclusion. He takes the L'Arche model and places it more within the framework of the ecclesiastical setting. Some key words used bring the word inclusion to focus. The reception of those excluded will help to bring about a new

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<sup>4</sup> Amos Yong, *The Bible Disability and The Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 1427, Kindle .

<sup>5</sup> Yong, *The Bible Disability and The Church*, 1427,1432,1437.

perception of a ministry because of an extended hand of love and hospitality, transforming the ministry into a relevant, vital, and vibrant mode of operation for the Holy Spirit.

Yong makes another point, “There is a direct correlation between inclusion and exclusion and what we determine as valuable. The more value that is placed upon the physically and mentally challenged and their families and caretakers, the more care and support is given or not given.” This is most important, even Christ when speaking to Apostle Peter after he had denied the Lord. Now, that the resurrection was a past event, Jesus waits for His disciple to return upon the shore with a meal that included broiled fish and honey comb. After dining with Jesus, He showed Peter his ministry would rise or fall based upon his love for the Savior. Peter because you love me, you will express that love by feeding my sheep. If you do not love me, how can you love the sheep? But if you have genuine love for me, that love will motivate you to care, nurture, and feed my sheep. (Jn 21:14-16). This is a valuable lesson for this project. It is not worth the time or the effort if perception of those that have been excluded from the worship community is considered of less value than others. But it is encouraging to think that value placed upon another can enhance the kingdom of God, and infuse an old ministry into a useful and productive part of the church community.

### **Joni and Friends International Disability Center**

Joni Eareckson Tata founded this ministry almost forty-nine years ago. In her own words:

A diving accident in 1967 robbed me of the use of my hands and legs, I found myself in a hospital ward wondering if I would ever smile and be hopeful again. I

had become just statistical data—another member of the population affected by disabilities. And I was dangerously close to becoming a number on the list of the depressed. The darkness lifted when friends from my church rallied around my family, offering help, hope, and positive meaning for my life. It was the church that kept us connected to reality, opening doors of possibility and paving the way for me to re-enter the mainstream of life. The church made all the difference.<sup>6</sup>

The overwhelming theme pointed out by Joni is the energizing statement from Jesus found in the book of Luke 14:13-14a, 23b (NIV): But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Make them come, so that my house will be full.

This global outreach is carried by radio broadcast to over 1,000 outlets and heard by over a million listeners. She is an accomplished best-selling author, artist, and singer. Joni served on the National Council on Disability and The Disability Advisory Committee to the U.S. State Department.<sup>7</sup>

This becomes another example of what appeared to be a youthful tragedy in the Baltimore area, without reason, but through the divine providence of a loving and caring God, was transformed into a ministry exposing over a million people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If there is anything that a person can gain in this ministry, it is the many facets of profound beauty in the way God sees value in every living soul and if we are in tuned in with our Creator it would do well for us to emulate.

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<sup>6</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada, *Joni: An Unforgettable Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. 2010), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Joni's Bio, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.joniandfriends.org/jonis-corner/jonis-bio/>.



## Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by Bob and Suzanne Wright,<sup>8</sup> grandparents of a child with autism. Recognizing the need for a powerful voice, Bernie Marcus donated \$25 million<sup>9</sup> to help financially launch the organization. Building upon the legacy of three leading autism organizations; Autism Coalition for Research and Education (ACRE), the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) and Cure Autism Now (CAN), which merged with the organization, Autism Speaks has made extraordinary advancements in the autism community. Chief among these are increased global awareness of autism, better understanding of the breadth of the autism spectrum, and advocacy to increase research and access to care and support.

Today, Autism Speaks is dedicated to advancing research into causes and better treatments for autism spectrum disorders and related conditions both through direct funding and collaboration; increasing understanding and acceptance of autism spectrum disorders; and working toward solutions for the needs of individuals with autism and their families across the autistic spectrum and lifespan through advocacy and support.

Bob Wright would proudly proclaim his wife Susan is Autism Speak.<sup>10</sup> When their little grandson, Christian was diagnosed with autism it started the Wrights on a journey, initiated by Susan, as a labor of love. After retirement as CEO of NBC and NBC Universal, Bob put all of his forty years of corporate experience into his wife's

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<sup>8</sup> Bob Wright, and Diane Mermingas, *The Wright Stuff: From NBC to Autism Speaks* (New York, NY: Rosetta Books/Random House, 2016), Kindle .

<sup>9</sup> Wright, and Mermingas, *The Wright Stuff*, 514-516.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, and Mermingas, *The Wright Stuff*, 134.

organization, Autism Speaks.<sup>11</sup> In the chapter dealing with “Autism, The Hidden Epidemic” the ratio of children in the 1980s was one out of 166. Today the ratio has changed drastically either by population change or by diagnosis:

- Autism now affects 1 in 68 children and 1 in 42 boys
- Autism prevalence figures are growing
- Autism is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the U.S.
- Autism costs a family \$60,000 a year on average
- Boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to have autism
- There is no medical detection or cure for autism<sup>12</sup>

Because of his experience in the corporate world, Bob Wright was looking for a springboard. The rigidity of which was found in corporate and the philanthropic made it very difficult. The hope of progress of their organization hinged upon multiple entities: Congress, medical and science communities, as well as insurance companies.<sup>13</sup> The interfacing of these giants became a difficult conundrum, which led to the most important fixture in the Autism Speaks organization, and that is “The Increase of Awareness.” A quote from Bob Wright confirms this notable argument:

But the beginning of autism presented one challenge that has no parallel at NBC—The question of awareness. I seriously doubt there were a dozen people in the US who were unfamiliar with NBC in 2004, but practically everyone, including the extremely intelligent, well informed people, knew nothing about autism, and had never even heard of the word. I knew from the very beginning if we were going to accomplish anything, increasing awareness had to be the first priority, because everything else—raising funds, supporting research, getting

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<sup>11</sup> Wright, and Mermingas, *The Wright Stuff*, 514.

<sup>12</sup> Facts About Autism, accessed November 29, 2016, [Autismspeaks.org/what-autism/facts-about-autism](http://Autismspeaks.org/what-autism/facts-about-autism).

<sup>13</sup> Facts About Autism, 4102.

better legislation, putting pressure on the insurers, everything flows from it. Awareness is the gateway through which we accomplished everything else, and still is...<sup>14</sup>

The summation of this organization is an effective entity and a forceful advocate for the autistic community and those with challenging conditions. It brings civility to a strange breed of institutions and organization that would normally not coalesce but because of awareness and pressure, the Wrights are in the forefront of change for the autistic child. Unlike Autism Speaks the intent is not to affect the global spectrum, but will not leave out divine intervention, our emphasis must be the church community context. There are also similarities of Autism Speaks and the thrust of this paper. Besides the emphasis of Communication Strategies as the foundational piece in our project, the awareness emphasis is the most vital part of this effort. This similarity is important for now, and it will continue to be an important part of our cadre training group.

### **Autism: Psychosis Versus Biological**

The work of Jill Boucher is a very resourceful offering entitled, *The Autistic Spectrum: Characteristics, Causes, and Practical Issue*. She covers the basic origin designated as the first identification by an American psychiatrist named Leo Kanner in a paper published in 1943 entitled “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.” The next year an Austrian medical student called Hans Asperger published a paper entitled “Die Autistischen Psychopathen im Kindesalter” (Autistic psychopathy in children).<sup>15</sup> Their findings were encapsulated into the characteristics and early descriptions of autism. Both

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<sup>14</sup> Facts About Autism, 4102.

<sup>15</sup> Jill Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum: Characteristics, Causes, and Practical Issues* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc. 2009), 4. Kindle.

their findings were not the same but within the same parameters, although they did overlap between the descriptions.<sup>16</sup> Asperger's writings according to Boucher were not received until 1991:

Asperger's paper was not brought to the attention of English-speaking researcher for nearly 40 years (Wing, 1981) and was not readily available in English until 1991. For 40 years, therefore, answers to the question "What is autism?" were largely shaped in English-speaking countries by Kanner's original descriptions, although Asperger's paper was influential in psychiatric circles in parts of Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Under the title of "Two Blind Alleys," Boucher describes two groups of professionals that they were leaning toward autism as a neurotic condition. This prompted psychotherapy, which led to a slippery slope clinical analysis with medical remedies.<sup>18</sup> Autism were linked to many other subtypes such as maternal rubella (German measles during pregnancy), or childhood schizophrenia or other forms of childhood psychosis, childhood disintegrative disorder, and rett syndrome which is characterized by some autistic-like behaviors. These were also analyzed and set into motion before Asperger's writing on autism was transcribed into English. Other behavior abnormalities which in the 1960s and 1970s embraced in-depth psychological investigation such as Down syndrome, mental retardation, specific language impairments (SLI), developmental dyslexia and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 8, 9.

From accumulation of data and the writings of Kanner and Asperger it has been determined that autism is not in the realm of the psychological but of the biological. As mentioned by the two founders of autism, Kanner and Asperger:

Autism is a brain-based condition with a biological origin: in other words he anticipated the view, now universally accepted, that autism is a biologically based neurodevelopmental condition... Rather than a neurotic or psychotic disorder, attention turned back to Kanner's original description, and modified versions of Kanner's diagnostic criteria began to appear in the English language literature.<sup>20</sup>

With the change in diagnosis from the neurotic to the biological, naturally the treatment would change. There would be less (if possible) dependence upon drugs as the panacea to all the autistic ills and more education and training in the cognitive spectrum. This development from the psychology community toward the autistic spectrum child has been a disappointing exercise, which has proven to be, over the years, the wrong diagnosis. The pioneers Kanner and Asperger set the blueprint for autistic spectrum disorder which should have been upheld in the various professional disciplines and which would have eliminated major deviation from the main thrust of their argument on autism. Jill Boucher puts it this way:

As autism-related conditions became increasingly well-recognized through the 1980s with child psychologists and psychiatrist in developing countries seeing more and more children with previously undiagnosed autism, and with the special educational needs of children with various forms of autism being increasingly recognized and catered for in schools, it was universally accepted that autism affects people who have no language or learning difficulties, as well as those who do have such difficulties... Thus, nearly 50 years after Asperger published his paper, people with the kinds of behaviors he had originally described could be diagnosed as autistic, as well as people with the fuller set of problems as originally described by Kanner. However, the diagnosis of 'Asperger syndrome' was not officially recognized until 1994.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 9, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 9, 10.

This theory has been helpful in maintaining proper data and proper focus. It has been one of the myths about professionals that they are, from laymen's understanding, invincible in their approach to their various procedures and applications. The key element is to honestly and diligently seek proper answers and seek the truth, wherever and however it may lead, is a great policy to pursue.

### **Feasible Inclusion**

Representatives of the American Medical Association or AMA express a valuable assessment of the risk involved in implementation of those with special needs into the church community. Edgar-Smith, J. Gill, and R. Palmer, in their Article *Bringing Youth With Special Needs Into The Church Community: A Practical Guide*, states that feasible inclusion doctrine emphasizes God's created goodness in all people and the value of Christian relationships present us with the opportunity to live out these truths within our churches by including youth with disabilities, the youth that often experience marginalization in other areas of their lives. They further state:

Inclusive congregations recognize that something critical is missing when people with disabilities are not participating. Yet inviting everyone to the table, those with and without disabilities, can be risky business that can potentially lead to unpredictable consequences, so it needs thoughtful implementation. Despite these challenges, doing this work remains vital for the health of the church. Our way of worshipping, teaching facilitating fellowship and organizing mission trips needs alterations that consider differences.<sup>22</sup>

The article mentions several important thoughts, which relate to this current project. The first is many writers relate to the church and the church setting but few are able to offer feasible practices, which include a small or mid-size congregation, this

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<sup>22</sup> S. Edgar-Smith, J. Gill, R. Palmer, "Bringing Youth with Special Needs into the Church Community: A Practical Guide." *The Journal of Youth Ministry* (serial online), 2013:11(2): 57-72. Available from ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Ipswich, MA, (accessed November 29, 2016).

makes up the norm in the church community. There also needs to be a stronger relationship with family members and the staff of the congregation, educating and supporting volunteers and the promoting of increased family involvement through what is called by this project, communication strategy. This would include an extra effort with all parties involved, to achieve that feasible inclusion that is so vital and important to our entire community.

In the article, it was mentioned that an individual with learning disabilities could exhibit one of the more than 500,000 combinations of cognitive or socio-emotional problems. It also should be noted that research on effective practices for social and behavioral difficulties often reveals that interventions and modifications implemented for these specific classifications of youth also work well with the whole learning community.

This theory reaches out to the midsize church community with proper curriculum based upon the populous, which is unique and interesting. The writer thought about the difference in community context but not to this extent. Generalities must be specified and detailed instead of vague and unhelpful. The project will advance with the knowledge gained from this article. Inclusion has its risk, but everything that is worthwhile is a risk.

### **The Ethics of Inclusion**

John Cobb in his chapter, "Ethics and Pluralism" runs the gamut on the reality and importance of variety and diversity. He places it under the title of acceptance but change through mutual encounters of those who are other than normal. For clarification Cobb states:

There are a variety of approaches to ethical issues. It is possible as long as none of the approaches claims to exclude the others; all of them can be viewed as

complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The problem is that ethical principles, when abstracted from a comprehensive world-view, give very little guidance in dealing with practical ethical issues.<sup>23</sup>

This ethical summation is acceptable for one who is mainly focused upon the world-view as the main source of ethical understanding, but of the church community strata, there is another approach, which comes from a biblical context. This also becomes an element of irony, when speaking of world-view and world-order, there is a tendency to retreat to a biblical context as our basis of belief and practice, and this holds others at bay. But when it comes to inter-workings of the church and worship, the biblical context is rarely applied for inclusion rather more exclusion. This must be corrected in order to increase inclusion.

### **Carly's Voice**

This is a fascinating book written by Arthur Fleischmann, the father of Carly Fleischmann in narrative and journal form which chronicles the trepidations, emotions and fears of an artistically challenged individual. The challenges that come with self-expression, the failures, as well as the successes; in spite of the problem of communication and the frustration that entails, she speaks. She speaks through her tears and through others. On page three she sums up her thoughts about her existence and expressions:

I am an autistic girl but autism doesn't define who I am or how I'm going to live my life. I have encountered many hardships in my life, but slowly and surely I have been overcoming a lot of obstacles in my path. There are many days when I

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<sup>23</sup> John B. Cobb, *Postmodernism and Public Policy: Reframing Religion, Culture, Education, Sexuality, Class, Race, Politics, and the Economy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 171-173.



think it might be easier to give up than fight. However if I give up, if I don't try, then who am I really?<sup>24</sup>

The most impressive thought about this presentation is how pragmatic it is and how understandable friendly it will be with the inclusion cadres. This brings out in a specific way, the awareness factor, which seems to permeate the thoughts of many in this writing. For communication strategy cannot be reached or addressed until all are aware of the many struggles the physically and mentally challenged face on a day-by-day basis, and perhaps they are things that others take for granted.

There are practical applications with narrative and emotional situations that are faced by everyone who identify with the challenged community. To see up close and personal the many challenges and to actually see in video form by going on the Internet at the following URLs [www.carlyvoice.com](http://www.carlyvoice.com) <http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Carlys-Voice/Arthur-Fleischmann/9781439194157> is amazing and a teachable moment for this project. To also be given the opportunity to correspond with sources for reading groups will help with our accumulation of communication strategy materials.

## **Conclusion**

This theoretical foundational work is vital to the doctor of ministry program because of the basic premise of becoming that, which supports the other elements of the program. Without this probing, and seeking and researching one would be left with a conglomerate of meaningless data with no progressive movement toward any goal.

These few pages have given more insight and purpose to the project. Beginning with the writings and the application of L'Arche, that wonderful spirit-filled community

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<sup>24</sup> Arthur Fleischmann and Carly Fleischmann, *Carly's Voice: Breaking through Autism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

of caretakers and those being cared for in a community of the challenged on a global platform, the outreach and the effect of this organization is awe inspiring and captivating. There are some minor inquiries that were noted in what is called the inclusion of the excluded, the writer feels, in the face of a society that seeks not to interact in a kind way, this alternative is quite safe and a refuge in stormy times.

On another global scale is Joni and Friends, which started from an accident that could have turned into a tragedy, but with a supporting family, an understanding and positive praying and helping church, was lifted from Joni Eareckson Tata the valley of despair to the mountaintop of hope. This is a powerful testimony to the power of prayer and the love and awareness that a church community could exhibit to those who are a part of the challenged group.

Moving to another global giant for inclusion, Autism Speaks started because of the grandson of Bob and Susan Wright. Susan started the organization and Bob, a retired CEO from NBC, took all his expertise and ingenuity and saturated it in the organization which resulted into a global awareness through various institutions and venues which aided the eradication of exclusion in any and all institutions. It was a massive effort on the part of this organization of which gratitude is an important factor.

We move from the global organization to a smaller scale organization called Feasible Inclusion. This is a local emphasis, which opened our eyes to the connection between congregations of a hundred, and how they play out in the worship community context. There are always elements that remain as anchors to understanding inclusion; love is a major part of this functioning entity. The proper biblical perspective is to look at the physically challenged as assets rather than liabilities. The communication training and

awareness is vital to inclusion. These would include communication with family members, caretakers and others who are involved in the lives of the challenged. In this the writer sees the detailed approach and the pragmatic approach as something, which needs to be achieved. The importance of this project is only realized when the ratio of new autistic persons are being added each day.

Now a little girl named Carly becomes that spark which ignites a flame in the heart of the church community. Her story inspires and captivates the heart with awareness and understanding. It is one single person with a family that loves her and a determination to matter and proclaim with one statement, “My Teeth Hurt.” This statement declared by Carly led her on a journey of self-awareness and opened the flood gates to those who have been seeking a way to collaborate and initiatives for the church community to help those who walk and live in the shadows. Most of these groups are, as in the words of Edgar-Smith, Gill, and Palmer, guided by principles founded in multiple disciplines, informed by theology and put into practice.

This is not an easy task, which lies ahead, but anything worth pursuing will take effort and sacrifice, sweat, prayer and tears to accomplish. Upon gathering data, and developing communication strategies, straining to complete the task and the effort of inclusion, it becomes worthwhile to look into the face of one smiling autistic child, and see the worship setting of the local community church radically changed as a result of the effort of this project.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

Within the conclusion of the synergy and integration paper there was a serious proposal stated to seek knowledge of the malady known as autism and to bring awareness to the contextual community which included the church, parents, grandparents and siblings through what was considered communication strategies. These strategies, will aid in the quest to transform situations of exclusion, as it relates to the autistic spectrum child, into an atmosphere of inclusion:

1. An increased awareness in the church community of the problem of exclusion experienced by the families and autistic individuals in the worship services.
2. A knowledgeable cadre/congregation equipped with a knowledge base of communication strategies for the challenged individuals to promote an atmosphere of inclusion.
3. An evaluated model measuring the impact of these communication strategies on the parents, family members, and the autistic individuals experience exclusion during Sunday morning worship services.
4. A trained evaluated, teaching inclusion cadre model as an instrument to promote inclusion in Sunday morning worship services. This inclusion cadre could possibly be used to train other churches which could lead to further study.

This will bring about unity in diversity. The historical and biblical factors relating to the word providence, provides a support structure in my theological discourse which led to a clearer understanding of the problem, which is addressing the problem of exclusion of the autistic spectrum child during Sunday morning worship services.

During the DMin journey there were many books and articles that were helpful and insightful which brought me to this point in the project, I was fascinated by the work of Jean Vanier and Father Thomas Philippe, in 1964 they invited two men, Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, men with limited abilities, to come and share their life in the spirit of the Gospel and the Beatitudes that Jesus preached. From these humble beginnings in France a community of caretakers were formed across the world from France to Australia to Canada and including the United States. Their belief is the sacredness and unique value of every individual no matter what the condition. Their name is L'Arche. In the French language this means "The Ark," or the place of refuge and security as in Noah's ark.

Another writing which aided me in the DMin program is the work of Dr. Amos Yong, *"The Bible, Disability, and The Church: A New Vision of the People of God"*. His use of the words exclusion and marginalization had an insightful effect on the way exclusion and inclusion was used in the project.<sup>1</sup> Also the works of Jean Vanier in his writing *"Becoming Human,"* his thoughts on how do we move from exclusion to inclusion and we grapple with disabilities, beggars like Lazarus in the bible or people suffering from aids, after all are we not talking about human beings? He uses the word normalization, affirming that they can be and must be like us in all aspects of life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and The Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2011, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), Kindle Books 1442.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* 1998, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), Kindle Books, 83.

Because of the work completed in the DMin program, the following was accomplished:

- *The Problem*— The exclusion of the autistic spectrum child during Sunday morning worship services.
- *The Hypothesis*— If they, the autistic spectrum child and their families and church community, learn to utilize effective communication strategies, then this will promote an atmosphere of inclusion, thereby impacting their experience of exclusion at Sunday morning worship service.
- *The Goals/Outcome*—
  1. An increased awareness in the church community of the problem of exclusion experienced by the families and autistic individuals in the worship services.
  2. A knowledgeable cadre/congregation equipped with a knowledge base of communication strategies for the challenged individuals to promote an atmosphere of inclusion.
  3. An evaluated model measuring the impact of these communication strategies on the parents, family members, and the autistic individuals experience exclusion during Sunday morning worship services.
  4. A trained evaluated, teaching inclusion cadre model as an instrument to promote inclusion in Sunday morning worship services. This inclusion cadre could possibly be used to train other churches which could lead to further study.

### **Methodology**

It is easy to be over-whelmed in a congregation of worshipers on a Sunday morning, but consideration of others in a worship atmosphere brings a refreshing atmosphere to all. An effective technique will only aid in our quest for inclusivity within the framework of worship. This project has not been completed by one entity but by many sensitive and caring people chosen by the writer. A group of eight people comprised the cadre group. They dedicated themselves to help with the distribution of

questionnaires, workshop participation, conference calls, helped with the interviews and gave instructions to the congregation as well as producing journals, pointing out pertinent articles, and assisting in collecting data.

In facilitating this project, it was determined by the writer to utilize the qualitative action research method, which included the six steps of pro-active research analysis:

- Step 1: Try a new practice (to have a different effect on others or to bring about better outcomes)
- Step 2: Incorporate hopes and concerns (hopes are what one strives to accomplish, concerns are what one predicts might happen, creating cautionary expectations about the new action)
- Step3: Collect data (on a regular basis for reaction and changes)
- Step 4: Check what the data mean (View new assessments and procedures)
- Step 5: Reflect on alternative ways to behave (how else can the subject or data be evaluated?)
- Step 6: Try a new practice (Another input of data to be tried and tested for impact and results).

The role and responsibilities of the cadre' contextual peer group were discussed, and were trained to conduct three workshops in communication strategies for the families and children which consisted of:

1. Instructions in sign-language (and other non-verbal communication)
2. Instructional aid through telecommunication (computer, I-Pad, I-Phone and Apps)
3. The use of visual illustrations, writing, coloring, games, and toys

Journals were requested of the Cadre' group to record on a weekly basis their thoughts and experiences within the contextual framework of our workshop classes and personal experiences with the autistic spectrum child.

Within the cadre' group there was an individual who studied statistics who aided us in the area of collection and compiling proper data from the pre/post survey to the congregants, the interviews with family, family members and caretakers of autistic spectrum child.

### **Sermonic Instructional Messages**

The congregants, with the assistance of the cadre group, were given instructions as to how to fill out the pre/post questionnaire. After the first questionnaire was given and collected, there were a series of instructional sermonic messages. The messages were taken from Exodus 4:10-12. This passage of scripture shows Moses reluctance to become Israel's leader and how he felt inadequate to perform the task. God states "who made your mouth, it is I, and I am aware of your inabilities and all inabilities." How God's providence works with what is described in 1 Cor 12:18-31; How God takes what is considered feeble parts of the body of Christ and transform them into necessary to the entire body of Christ. There were also instructions in autism and compassion which aided their knowledge of this subject.

The messages were specifically designed to measure pre/post awareness of congregants learning and understanding the many facets of autism. This awareness segment points to a clear meaning how one excludes and how to promote inclusion within the worship services for the autistic spectrum child.



### Personal Interviews

There were nine (9) interviews given to congregants who raised, were siblings of or caretakers of the autistic spectrum child. I conducted the interviews. The interviews were phone recorded from my home. With the help of the statisticians within the cadre's group the interview data was compiled and analyzed. The questions were open-ended, which led to free spirited discussion, yet autism remained the clear focus.

The interviews were engaging and enlightening. There were tears shed and there were resolved expressed that had an impact not only on those who were interviewed, but the interviewer as well. This triangulation gathering of research was pronounced in its effort to statistically find proper understanding in data analysis and what it all means for the autistic spectrum child within the contextual framework of Union Grove Baptist Church.

This calendar was designed to place all activities of the writer, cadre' peer group, and all data into a sequential format.

### Project Calendar

May 1st	Conference call with inclusion cadre for discussion of prescribed journals and selecting questions for interviews.
May 5 <sup>th</sup>	Conference call with professional associates for consultation and support.
May 8th	Conference call with peer group to lend support and to receive support.
May 11th	Met with cadre to begin preliminary training, explain expectations, the importance of interviews and confidentiality and future dates for inventory and questionnaires. (Collect preliminary data.)
	Begin the utilization process of Action Research Six Steps of the Proactive Qualitative Action Research.

- Step 1: Try a new practice (to have a different effect on others or to bring about better outcomes)
- Step 2: Incorporate hopes and concerns (hopes are what one strives to accomplish, concerns are what one predicts might happen, creating cautionary expectations about the new action)
- Step3: Collect data (on a regular basis for reaction and changes)
- Step 4: Check what the data mean (View new assessments and procedures)
- Step 5: Reflect on alternative ways to behave (how else can the subject or data be evaluated?)
- Step 6: Try a new practice (Another input of data to be tried and tested for impact and results).

May 14 <sup>th</sup>	Explanation of theme on Sunday morning worship at Union Grove, and introduction of the inclusion cadre included in the church bulletin will be a pre-awareness survey, which will be followed up with a post-awareness survey (Collect data).
May 21 <sup>st</sup>	Sermon topics will focus upon the exclusion of the physically and mentally challenged in the worship service setting, the challenges, which confronts their families and the congregation (Collect data).
June 6-10 <sup>th</sup>	Trained cadres in communication strategies, and questionnaire for church community.
June 13-16 <sup>th</sup>	Interviewed family members and those associated with the physically and mentally challenged (Collect data).
June 21-23 <sup>rd</sup>	Met with cadre to compile, organize, analyze the data, surveys and questionnaires from congregation, families and others. Discuss ideas how we may become more effective in our efforts to increase inclusion for the physically and mentally challenged in worship services.
June 27-29 <sup>th</sup>	Follow-up and secure all data with the results of everything completed and ready to be compiled into project paperwork with the result ready to be presented

## **Implementation**

In this section, the fieldwork experience will be discussed which was conducted on the facilities of Union Grove Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio. The qualitative, pro-active research method was implemented with the collaborative initiative of the congregants, parents, grandparents, and the peer group. The writer emphasized the basis of the thesis: “Addressing the problem of exclusion experienced by the autistic spectrum child, during Sunday morning worship services and the hypothesis: If the autistic spectrum child and their families, and congregants will learn and utilize effective communicative strategies, this will promote an atmosphere of inclusion, thereby impacting their experience of exclusion during Sunday morning worship services.” Our yearly church theme which began in January 2017 “Facing Challenges” helped to crystalize the subject of awareness with a congregation of nearly five hundred members, which includes active and inactive members.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the pastor gave an explanation of the theme to the congregants and the introduction of the cadre peer group along with their assignments. The congregants agreed to become participants in the qualitative research project, beginning with pre- and post-awareness survey conducted by the cadre peer group. For the next four Sundays the congregants were made aware through instructional sermons, of the certain definitions, characteristics, and phenotype of the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) child. Before this took place, the congregants were given the pre-survey without any information and at the end of the instructional sermons, the post-survey. The questionnaire, which included ten questions, was to determine, at the outset, what was known by the congregants, concluding with a post-survey to see if any increase of

awareness was accomplished. For some reason all congregants did not complete their surveys and no explanations were given. There was an increase number at the post survey because of some members who were not at the pre-survey were there at the post-survey and received questionnaires.

Secondly, nine interviews were conducted in families with designated and undesignated autistic spectrum children to research exclusion and un-comfortability of the families during Sunday morning worship services. The questions were open-ended and free flowing which yielded much research data and insight.

Finally, the writer implemented training seminars to help the cadre peer group to identify and teach communication strategies, which will become effective tools in the awareness arsenal for parents as well as congregants.

### **Completed Survey/Questionnaire**

The survey/questionnaire was administered twice, to the congregants of Union Grove Baptist Church. For the first session, a total of 101 congregants and for the second session there was a total of ninety-eight congregants. First and second sessions are displayed as 1<sup>st</sup> number and 2<sup>nd</sup> number respectively e.g. 31/59.

1. Before today, have you ever heard the term “Autistic Spectrum Disorder”?
  - a. Yes, I know what it means- 31/59
  - b. Yes, I never knew exactly what it meant- 37/26
  - c. No, I never heard it before- 33/13
  
2. A person with autism may exhibit ritualistic or repetitive behavior.
  - a. Yes- 78/91 No- 2/0      I don't know- 21/7

3. A person with autism can be cured or will eventually grow out of it.

a. Yes- 9/2 No- 55/86 I don't know- 37/10

4. A person with autism does not want friends.

a. Yes- 14/9 No- 64/74 I don't know- 23/15

5. Autism is associated with mental retardation.

a. Yes- 29/21 No- 42/65 I don't know- 30/12

6. A person with autism cannot show affection.

a. Yes- 22/20 No- 55/69 I don't know- 24/9

7. A person with autism may not have normal sleeping patterns.

a. Yes- 44/61 No- 14/15 I don't know- 43/22

8. Autism is called by poor parenting.

a. Yes- 3/3 No- 83/92 I don't know- 15/3

9. A person with autism has difficulty interacting with others.

a. Yes- 61/78 No- 24/11 I don't know- 16/9

10. Do autistic individuals make you uncomfortable?

a. Yes- 16/81 No- 73/11 I don't know- 12/6

### The Same Data Analysis in Percentages

1. Before today, have you ever heard the term “Autistic Spectrum Disorder”?
  - a. Yes I know what it means- 31%/59%
  - b. Yes, I never knew exactly what it meant- 37%/26%
  - c. No, I never heard it before- 33%/12%
  
2. A person with autism may exhibit ritualistic or repetitive behavior.
  - a. Yes- 78 %/ 89%    No- 2 %/0%                      I don’t know- 21%/ 6%
  
3. A person with autism can be cured or will eventually grow out of it.
  - a. Yes- 9 %/2%              No- 55 %/ 84%              I don’t know- 37%/ 10%
  
4. A person with autism does not want friends.
  - a. Yes-14 %/ 8%              No- 64%/ 72%              I don’t know- 23 %/14%
  
5. Autism is associated with mental retardation.
  - a. Yes- 29 %/ 21%    No- 42%/ 64%              I don’t know- 30 %/ 12%
  
6. A person with autism cannot show affection.
  - a. Yes- 22 %/ 20%    No- 55%/ 68%              I don’t know- 24%/ 9%
  
7. A person with autism may not have normal sleeping patterns.
  - a. Yes- 44%/ 61%    No- 14%/ 15%              I don’t know- 43%/ 22%
  
8. Autism is called by poor parenting.
  - a. Yes- 3%/ 3%              No- 83%/ 90%              I don’t know- 15%/ 3%

9. A person with autism has difficulty interacting with others.

a. Yes- 61%/74%    No- 24 %/ 11 %    I don't know- 16 %/ 9%

10. Do autistic individuals make you uncomfortable?

a. Yes- 16% / 79%    No- 73%/ 11%    I don't know- 12 %/ 6%

### **Interviews of Autistic Spectrum Children's Parents and Guardians**

The construct of interviews was conducted in the student's home with technical microphones connected to the phone for recording. The interviewees were aware they were being recorded.

Regarding questionnaire presented to the congregants, the demographics were similar, there are young parents as well as seniors, young siblings, middle-aged parents, with financial income ranging from lower to median income; from siblings, to parent's grandparents, guardians, and caretakers.

The conundrum centers on the determination of criteria for the interview as it relates to the autistic spectrum child. Who qualifies to be interviewed? Within these nine interviews there are designated autistic children by the medical profession, there are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) children, and non-designated children. The determining factor for ADHD is based on a study completed by Autism Research, and published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of International Society for Autism Research, which is entitled: *Overlap Between Autism Spectrum Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Searching for Distinctive/Common Clinical Features*.<sup>3</sup>

As with those included in this interview who were non-designated by medical profession,

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<sup>3</sup> Francesco Craig, Anna Linda Lamanna, Francesco Margari, Emilia Matera, Marta Simone, and Lucia Margari, "Overlap between autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: searching for distinctive/common clinical features," *Autism Research*, vol. 8, issue 3, June 2015: 328-337.

there is a biological connection between each group. The terminology used to describe this connection is also used by Jill Boucher, in her book, *The Autistic Spectrum: Characteristic, Causes, and Practical Issue*; both book and article call the connection, Phenotype, which has to do with classified autism-related conditions as members of a group of pervasive developmental disorders (PPDs).<sup>4</sup> The designated areas are outlined as three subtypes of autism: autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.<sup>5</sup> Autism Research also concurs with this finding. In a statement from their article:

Clinical and neuroimaging findings have led a revision of the ADHD exclusion criteria in recent publication of the DSM-5 (*American Psychiatric Association*, 2013). In fact, autism is no longer an exclusion criterion and both ASD and ADHD can be diagnosed together (DSM). Although there are some important differences (e.g., core symptom definition and recommended treatment), ASD and ADHD share many similar impairments in different domains that could complicate a differential diagnosis<sup>6</sup>

Among the overlapping phenotypes are the following:

- Qualitative impairment in social interaction (non-verbal behaviors, eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction).
- Non-developmental peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneity in interest and shared enjoyment
- Repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum: Characteristics Causes, and Practical issues*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009) 11 Kindle

<sup>5</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 12, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Criag et al., "Overlap between autism spectrum disorders," 328.



- Repetitive patterns of behavior
- Restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus.<sup>7</sup>

It is because of this criterion, these three areas are included as a part of the interview format for a total of nine interviewees. Worship referred to is the Union Grove Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio.

### **The Nine Interviews**

1. Tell me about your child?

- Special (Autistic Spectrum Disorder)
- Wonderful (ADHD)
- Autistic, deaf in both ears, usher syndrome
- Autistic
- Under developed motor skills, delayed walking until 2 years of age, self-inflicted wounds, non-verbal communications, mental retardation, played piano, only one tune
- Mental retardation
- Crazy but in a good way, mental retardation
- ADHD

2. Is worship comfortable for you and your child?

Yes- 6

No- 2

Yes and No- 2

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<sup>7</sup> Boucher, *The Autistic Spectrum*, 12.

Reasons for No:

- Afraid the child would harm someone
- Sometime leave child at home with relatives or bring to rehearsal, fear of outburst

Reason for Yes and No:

- Helpful members, but afraid of child's outburst and attention span.
- Cannot send him unless I am able to attend.

3. What kind of reception is there for you and your child upon entering worship?

Good- 7          Not Good- 2

Reason for Not Good designation:

- Limited attention span and commotion caused by the child.
- The child does not do well in crowds.

4. Do you feel the child is needed and wanted in the worship services?

Yes- 7          Sometimes- 1          Somewhat- 1

5. Are there any negative aspects of the child being a part of worship?

Yes- 4          No- 5

Among the Yes, the following response was recorded

- Difficulty relating on the part of the child
- Making noise and chattering
- The child's short attention span
- The child as a distraction

6. Does anyone help you during worship services?

Yes- 9

Among the Yes, are these responses:

- If needed
- A few people within the church
- My family, my brothers, my sisters
- The kids at church
- Special friends
- Husband, wife

7. What do you do to ease the pressure of caring for this child?

- 6 interviewees turn to family members
- Sew, workout, pray
- Go to bedroom for quiet time, take walks, let the child color
- Learning to become a better me

8. How can we improve the atmosphere of worship for you and your child?

- On my part, better attendance
- Can't think of anything
- Be willing to listen
- Not sure how to answer
- Atmosphere is nice
- Receiving help
- Show that you care

- Together in unified worship
- Work with us

9. What are suggestion and or ideas that will help our worship?

- Christian counseling service
- Support groups
- Providers to help during worship, but remain as a part of worship
- A room which helps their behavior and socialization
- A room which includes their normal routine (Computer, I-Pad, TV)
- A comfort zone for the autistic children and somehow be attached to worship

10. Are you willing to help?

Yes- 9

### **Communication Strategies**

#### **Cadre Peer Group**

This group was structured to attend the training seminars, assist the writer in quality research, pre/post distribution of materials, compile the received data, and become a part of the teaching structure of this project. There were a total of six involved in the group. The writer began with three conference calls and training sessions beginning May 1, 2017, with subsequent dates May 08, 2018, May 18, 2017, and June 16, 2017. They assisted with interviews, shared personal journals on the theme, Facing Challenges. They were aware of what it meant to be excluded as an autistic child from worship services and

expressed their concern and compassion. The sessions were instructional in make-up, which added to their understanding and enthusiasm about the project and how they could assist.

The communication strategies were conducted at Union Grove Baptist Church and some implementation of strategies were tried and tested at the writer's home with autistic children, which yielded substantial results based upon the pro-active approach from the data received from the interviews.

A helpful source of material was gleaned from the writings of Susan Flynn in her article entitled *Inclusion strategies for students with autism spectrum disorders*.<sup>8</sup> She points to cognitive, constructive achievement while using these unique methods of communication:

1. American Sign Language: deaf students who use an English-based version of sign language (English syntax with borrowed American Sign Language signs). This is easy to implement in fact, several of the cadre group has been certified in American Sign Language. Non-verbal autistic spectrum children have been taught American Sign Language or portions of the strategy to communicate with others. Also, working with students who use a variety of modes of communication, including interpreters, hearing aids, and cochlear implants which sends electronic impulses to the brain that produces audible hearing to a once-deaf child.
2. Visual Communication supports children with autism. According to Flinn: Teachers should try to determine communicative attempts displayed by the student's behavior. For example, if a non-verbal student with ASD screams halfway through literacy instruction and the teacher allows the student to stop the activity, that student has successfully "escaped" the undesired activity by screaming. At that point give a break by giving a visual symbol for "break" which is understood by all the children. After the break proceed with literacy instructions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Flynn, "Inclusion strategies for students with autism spectrum disorders," accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/every-learner/6692>.

<sup>9</sup> Flynn, "Inclusion strategies for students with autism."

A highly successful tool is the visual communication app connected with many technical devices: iPad, iPhone, and laptop computers. *Voice4u AAC* (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) is a picture-based communication app for those who have speech challenges. The app easily bridges the communication gap, provides more accurate understanding of the individual's wants, and needs. It comes with numerous vivid and memorable-specially designed graphics that can assist and improve individuals' language skill. *The Proloquo2Go* is the only AAC app that combines unique features, such as research-based vocabulary levels, (activity) templates to support motor-planning and expressive power, to express one's self and full bilingual support. It appears with touch graphics that say, "I am hungry," "I am happy," "I am sad" and other needy expressions.<sup>10</sup>

### Summary of Learning

The anticipated goals of this project born out of what perceived as a problem: the exclusion of the autistic spectrum child, during Sunday morning worship services. From this initial problem a hypothesis was developed: If they (the autistic and their families) learn and utilize effective communication strategies, then this will promote an atmosphere of inclusion, thereby impacting their experience of exclusion at Sunday morning worship services at the Union Grove Baptist Church. From the hypothesis, four (4) goals were established:

1. An increased awareness in the church community of the problem of exclusion experienced by the families and autistic individuals in the worship services.
2. A knowledgeable cadre/congregation equipped with a knowledge base of communication strategies for the challenged individuals to promote an atmosphere of inclusion.
3. An evaluated model measuring the impact of these communication strategies on the parents, family members, and the autistic individuals experience exclusion during Sunday morning worship services.
4. A trained evaluated, teaching inclusion cadre model as an instrument to promote inclusion in Sunday morning worship services. This inclusion cadre

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<sup>10</sup> Proloquo2Go.com, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://www.common sense.org/education/app/proloquo2go>.

could possibly be used to train other churches which could lead to further study.

After the qualitative action research data with the assistance of the Cadre' peer group the pre/post survey was given. From this data we could see an increase in awareness of autism. The data also suggested there was a considerable knowledge increase from the pre-survey as compared to the post-survey. This was what is consider a plus and that the sermonic-instructional messages were effective. Many congregants were not aware of the many nuances of the autistic spectrum child and how it impacted their thoughts. It also produced more independent reading and research by the congregants and parents alike.

The data also suggest in the category of the questionnaire with yes, no, or I don't know areas, there were shift and decreases. The Yes category would increase, the no category would lessen and the I don't know areas would in some cases increase suggesting the impact of awareness took a sudden shift which was our intended goal. The next area of qualitative action research included personal interviews with nine (9) parents, siblings, and guardians. The data was collected and analyzed. The data suggested that the parents were appreciative of the congregants for their help and assistance with their children. It also suggested that their anguish about their children in some degree was self-inflicted. In other words, some said they did not attend worship services consistently because of work, tired, afraid their child was creating an outburst or would do harm to someone. Their hopes and desire, as listed in the date was, so see a room or space just for their child, to develop a focus group of people in whom they could confide and share encouraging, instructional, and theological discussions about their children and how to assist them. It also suggested an avenue of congregants that would establish an escape

night for parents and guardians to find relief from the day today pressure and grind of being a caretaker.

The communication strategies which were given to the Cadre' contextual peer group prove to become most effective in overseeing the entire data process. Without the peer group, there would not be a positive outcome to the data. Helping to collect and assist in this process proved to be vital to the overall project.

According to the data, for the most part the goals were achieved, but in the area of the hypothesis, the data suggest that the exclusion of the autistic child during Sunday morning worship services was not a part of the thinking and attitude of the congregants. Their behavior and attitude toward the autistic child or any child with disabilities was one, for the most part compassion and assistance. Within the data, in the interviews, parents would relate stories of children and adults that assisted their children. In some cases, they saw the children as their friends and would question parents about the whereabouts of their children if they were not there for worship. Although some of the autistic children would find a safe place of isolation during Sunday morning worship, the other children would find them and play with them. They knew the objective is to keep autistic children occupied with toys and apps. This was an eye-opener for us. It was assumed that the hypothesis was spot on and there would be seen an element of exclusion and marginalization, but within the context of this project these elements according to the data was not seen. Why? Because generalization does not easily fit in all contextual congregants and attitudes and behaviors are learned which produces a cultural friendly or exclusive environment. There are several other elements which explain the failing of the hypothesis:



1. The pastor's autistic spectrum grandchild, and the way the pastor positively expressed publicly his love and appreciation for her.
2. The expression emanating from the pastor's family, the love for the autistic child.
3. The courageous gesture of strength from the mother and sibling of the autistic child.
4. Encapsulating in all these elements are the children of the congregants who love unconditionally the autistic grandchild of the pastor and others who happen to come for worship services.
5. This set the tone for an inclusive, compassionate, experienced, spiritually sensitive and awareness congregation.

A special widget gadget was utilized. This device has been around for years. It was designed to aid in expanding the attention so that easy, productive learning could be executed. Through this engagement with the technical and the tactical efforts, the autistic participants showed more patience, less stress, and a willingness to learn. This has become a part of the healthy routine of some of the autistic children's daily activities. Because of the communication strategy sign-language became a part of the ministry of Union Grove Baptist Church.

The writer learned that the information gathered and analytically digested is just touching the surface of such a vast array of knowledge and more extensive research should be done to help this inexhaustible subject.

### **Recommendation And Conclusion**

The recommended model emanates from a collaborative effort from the cadre peer group, in their sessions, communication with parents, grandparents, siblings, local providers, congregants, and with the writer. These recommendation centers on the following:

1. Education (training). A more extensive educational forum, focused upon more communication strategies, behavioral as well as socialization, three critical components to a well-rounded approach to the educational model. Included also the biblical component of the meaning and message of providence in the lives of the parents and autistic spectrum child.

*Continual Awareness* model for the congregants. Bringing the current focus and insightful articles through our website; pertinent and notable facts, and inspirational stories of the autistic spectrum child.

American Sign Language classes encapsulated within the present on going sign language ministry at Union Grove Baptist Church.

2. We Care Ministry: A support group comprised of the pastor and other leaders, parents, grandparents, siblings, and others, to assist, aid, to listen and help ease the pressure of nurturing the autistic child.

*On Call Christian* counseling services to aid in those critical and crucial moments of need to communicate.

Support during worship services through revamping facilities to become autistic friendly: intercom speakers for listening to worship services/ technical usable devices, communications apps, TV, and monitors, to aid in creating an atmosphere of comfort for the autistic child.

3. A special empowerment program designed to aid the caretakers of the autistic spectrum child. The organization Autism Speaks estimates that it takes around \$60,000 a year to support someone with an ASD child. This extra income needed to secure the ASD child and to take care of household necessities. The program will be designed to walk the caretaker through the steps to become a certified provider for their child thus providing necessary income and medical protection for the ASD child.
4. L'Arche Model: This is the brain child of Jean Vanier in 1964 to help those with intellectual disabilities by establishing a community with caretakers living, working, and securing these individuals within their own structured and secured apartments.<sup>11</sup> Our model would be called "Maya's Hands," named after the writer's granddaughter. Union Grove Baptist Church would establish a corporation status under the 501-C CDC and provide property to develop the apartments and the government would supply the proper funding with members and other stakeholders meeting all certification standards and criteria.

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin S. Wall, *Welcome as a Way of Life: A Practical Theology of Jean Vanier* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

In conclusion, the writer sees this project as a starting point, and a platform for the least, the less, and the lost. It was such a blessing to see and envision the possibilities that began to germinate in the writer's mind because of what was uncovered in the quality research data. There is a reason and a hope for this project. The hope is that long after the writer has taken his flight to glory, this project and vestiges of this project will be implemented and still in place for countless ASD children and others will continually reap the benefits and blessings not in the name of the writer, or Union Grove Baptist Church, or any other church or organization, but in the match-less name of the writer's savior, Jesus Christ.

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